

DEANERY CONFERENCE AND FESTIVAL 2017

Members of the Deanery gathered round Archbishop John at High Leigh Conference Centre from 26 – 29 May to worship and pray together, to listen to each other, and to celebrate our shared identity.

Attentive listening was a main theme of the conference, initiated by Professor Mary Cunningham who spoke on Learning to listen: what do we hear?

In today's world we listen and speak only to those who agree with us and 'discussion' is like a tennis match, trying to score points, to win, and not listening to others at all. In the Gospels we are told that the whole Law is to love God and to love our neighbour, even to love those who hate us. How are we to do this? By recognising the otherness of others, by opening ourselves to others. We are relational beings.

Metropolitan Anthony in his book *School for Prayer* says our relationship with God is like that with others; we have to pay attention to God in prayer, humble ourselves before him, purify ourselves and this is only possible through opening ourselves to Him. Inner prayer is open to all who long to draw near to God. Citing the late Wendy Robinson's *Exploring Silence*, we were encouraged to growing openness and sense of presence. God is around us and in us. As the *Cloud of Unknowing* says 'God is your being'.

Germanos of Constantinople in a sermon on the Annunciation shows the Virgin in dialogue with Gabriel, listening, engaging with what he says, establishing the reality of his message. This is the model for us in

dialogue with others. Then we will see God in them, see them as humans who have their own depths, their own uniqueness.

Saturday began with a Panikhida for departed Deanery members. Our first talk of the day was by Dr Elena Narinskaya with the title *Revelation through Scripture; Nature and Incarnation in Syriac Christian Tradition*. The mystery of the Incarnation is a paradox, God becoming Man, God becoming Bread for people to eat. Poetry with its use of parable, myth and symbol can express the mystery more effectively than strictly rational theology. St Ephrem the Syrian is the great example of this from the fourth century, creating a theology that could be sung as the heretics sang their arrogant claim that Christ's nature could be fully explained. He organised women's choirs to sing his hymns. Dr Narinskaya's enthusiasm for St Ephrem was apparent in her many quotations which gave us a glimpse of his richness.

God gives us Nature and Scripture as witnesses 'the natural world through Man's use of it, the book through his reading of it'. Together they cleanse the land of the heart and plant the new commandments. Poetry uses metaphor and symbol so that people can understand. Types link the OT and the NT and link this world and the heavenly world e.g. Noah's dove and Mary's Annunciation. Nature provides a base for poetic paradox e.g. the Shepherd who became the Lamb, the Vineshoot that became the Chalice.

Clothing is an image of Incarnation. God gave Adam and Eve a garment of glory, which they lost. God restores it, first allowing himself to be clothed in human

language and then clothe himself in human nature. It is as if when Christ was baptised he left the robe of glory in the water for humans to put on at their baptism, a robe they are to keep clean until the Lamb's wedding banquet (Matthew 22.12 the parable of the wedding garment).

All this spiritual poetry expresses things that can hardly be expressed in terms of logic, philosophy or theology. It is part of our tradition and we should be attentive to its richness.

After an extended period of discussion Protodeacon Peter Scorer spoke on Metropolitan Evlogii and the beginnings of the Archdiocese.

Metropolitans Anthony and Evlogii had characteristics in common; both drew inspiration from the Moscow Council of 1917 and both could be pastorally flexible. Evlogii's work was his life, two thirds in Russia and then for 25 years in Paris. Born in central Russia he knew poverty as the son of a priest. Unusually he emerged from junior and senior seminaries with faith and vocation intact. Becoming a monk on the advice of Fr Amvrosy of Optina he became bishop of the vicariate of Helm, in Ukraine, which became a full diocese, in 1902. Like other churchmen he was elected to the Duma in 1906, representing a centre-right party but chiefly the people of his diocese. Translated to a larger diocese in 1914 he took part in the 1917 Council and had a great loyalty for Patriarch Tikhon. While attending a Council of the Ukrainian Church he was arrested by the Bolsheviks and imprisoned along with Metropolitan Khrapovitskii, the eventual founder of ROCOR. His time in prison left him, as he said, 'a different man'. On release he

emigrated to Serbia and in 1921 the Karlovtsy Synod (later to become ROCOR) appointed him to responsibility for the churches in Western Europe. Very importantly in view of future events this appointment was confirmed by Patriarch Tikhon and the Archbishop of Petrograd.

Moving to Paris, and once more living in poverty, he undertook a major reorganisation, forming and strengthening parishes all over Western Europe, in Morocco, and Tunisia. He founded the St Sergius Institute, being described as its soul and father. Against ROCOR, which had become more rigid, he affirmed the status of his charge as derived from Moscow. This was the first split; another followed after Metropolitan Sergii, the acting leader of the Russian church, declared that there was no persecution in Russia and that the church was servant of the state. Metropolitan Evlogii sought the protection of the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1931. After the war he returned to Moscow's jurisdiction but many of his parishes refused to follow. A Clergy/Laity conference in 1946 agreed that the Exarchate should remain with Constantinople.

Evlogii was a loving pastor. This motivated his political involvement and all his dealings with his parishes. He was moved by what was best for the Church in particular historical circumstances.

Protodeacon Peter urged us to read the Metropolitan's Autobiography *My Life's Journey*.

On Sunday Archbishop John celebrated the Liturgy with all the priests present as concelebrants. This was the inspiring act of

worship to which we look forward every year. The Archbishop ordained as reader, Stephen (Morys) Ireland and Peter Cousins; as sub-deacon, Readers Vladimir Sparta and Stephen (Morys) Ireland; and as deacon, Sub-deacon Vladimir Sparta. Their respective parishes are: Clapham, Northampton and Keswick. He also elevated Fr Edwin Hunt to the status of Archpriest and Fr David Gill to be Igoumen for our monastics. We were once again indebted to Annemarie Visser for her direction of the choir for this and all the services during the conference.

Fr Porphyrios spoke on Internalised Experience and External Reality. He began with a brief video of Metropolitan Anthony who said that in a secular world churches are places of refuge for God; every one of us is a place of refuge for God. He asked if we see others in this way, as an extension of the Incarnation of Christ, an image of God. Then Fr Porphyrios suggested that our relations with each other are evangelistic. We show to others the courtesy that is involved in right celebration of the Liturgy, the attentiveness which the deacon's call 'Let us attend' requires of us. He reminded us that every Liturgy is a concelebration; everyone present is a concelebrant. Anglicans and Roman Catholics talk of 'collaborative ministry'. The idea but not the expression is in the 1917 Council. The Liturgy makes us the church and we go out to celebrate the Liturgy (the work) after the Liturgy. The Holy Spirit unites us, working differently in each of us. According to an Athonite Father we are like a dance company, each playing our part in a sacred dance by which God is glorified.

Humans are relational beings. Person and community are two sides of one life. Just as in the Liturgy there is complementarity of the separate roles and properly none should perform the role of another, so there is after the Liturgy. We all play our part in the dance, paying attention to one another.

Discussion brought out the fact that Christians do not show courtesy to each other and Orthodox are as guilty as any. Mechanical celebration of the Liturgy was deplored; every one should be attentive to the significance of what they are doing/saying. Christ was a deacon throughout his ministry until the Last Supper.

Sunday evening brought the party. The children and young people presented the Ten Commandments in a variety of amusing and thought provoking ways, using drama and song. They had obviously worked hard as well as having fun during their conference. Musical talent, vocal and instrumental, was then on display from conference members across the age range.

The final morning was taken up with discussion of what might be the theme of next year's conference.

Prayer and using the Bible in prayer were suggestions from several quarters, partly influenced by what had happened in the daily discussion groups and workshops. Bishop John gave an impromptu talk on prayer which whetted our appetite for more. Parish reports, a Moleben, and a last meal together sent us on our way.

Ian Randall