

The Second Sunday before Lent, 4 February 2024, Year B
Colossians 1.15-20 & John 1.1-14

Today's readings immerse us in the depths of our Christian believing none more so than the reading from Colossians claiming that Christ Jesus meaning literally 'Messiah saves' is **the image of the invisible God** in addition to John's Prologue on which we recently heard a sermon by Robert. Both readings point us to what theologians call a High Christology. A High Christology being the touchstone of our Christian faith and knowing, as we will affirm shortly as we recite the Nicene Creed. I begin by citing the final two sentences of today's reading from John's Prologue. They will serve as a springboard to what follows on the divine reality glory:

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

I hope a good number of us know we recently kept the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. On Tuesday I attended a service in the Armenian Apostolic Church in the third district as a precursor to the Cardinal Archbishop's Ecumenical reception in his Palais in the city centre. I mention the above because of the sermon delivered by the Romanian Orthodox priest. He for me at least unusually honed in on the word glory in the context of Jesus' prayer that the disciples may all be one as He Jesus and Father are one. Jesus' prayer is a prayer for unity that the disciples be one. In that passage from John's gospel Jesus goes on to say

"The glory that you have given me I have given [the disciples], so that they may be one, as we are one..." and

"Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

As stated the sermon focused unusually on glory in the context of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, on the glory that Jesus gifts the disciples, as well as the glory that is always his for “he is the beginning”. The whole prayer is set within the Trinitarian context of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which includes glory. What the preacher pointed out and I wish to hold onto is that glory given. It is the foundation for the unity that the disciples should enjoy with God and with one another as captured in John’s gospel. The preacher continued,

“The work of unity requires immersing oneself in this glory, which Christ has gifted us. It is through immersing oneself in Christ’s glory that we experience him as the divine Son of the Father, as Saviour. This is where we encounter the source of knowledge.”

The preacher also pointed out that Jesus states while the glory is given unity remains a should a should, something that is needful (ein Soll). On our way to unity we require being immersed in glory and are to share this glory of God that we have been granted. He concluded that this is liberating because the whole world of the liturgy is a workshop of glory that God has gifted us.

“In liturgical prayer, we are immersed in this glory, knowing full well that we are still fragments. As individuals, as families, as parishes, as communities - we are fragments, not perfects. Nevertheless, with every liturgical prayer we become co-workers of this glory. And the more this glory surrounds and envelops us, the closer, more possible, more attractive, more inevitable the experience of unity becomes.”

I don’t know about you, but as I listened to the sermon it resonated within me, while also challenging me. Some of the best sermons have a dual character of something understood, but also at the same time of something just beyond our knowing. I maintain that being a historical church the Church of England from one perspective has a closer affinity to Orthodoxy than to the Latin West, but I emphasise only from one perspective sadly not accessible to many. We see our

affinity for example in our commitment to the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church, the Catholic creeds, the Christian calendar, as well as the ordering and importance of worship and the centrality of the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, but also in our commitment to an ordered prayer life through liturgical prayer of Morning and Evening prayer and to at least one celebration of Holy Communion weekly.

To my mind orthodoxy does mean not right belief in the first instance, but right glory, a true vision, a right splendor, which leads to right belief. (pasted in below a short article on Glory). It is through living in the glory that God gifts us that we are to seek the unity that God intends for us to live through prayer. Some present might recall that I sought to explain what glory is at a family service after the summer. Glory is derived from a Hebrew word meaning weight meaning God's glory matters. It has substance. It has gravitas. Having importance, it is a weight that grounds us. God roots us as we praise God as we give Glory to God on high. Glory and many know this intuitively that to acknowledge and perceive God's glory brings with it an illuminating lightness of being. Because God's glory is associated with brightness and light churches have turned to gold in the writing of icons and in the West in paintings (here I am thinking of Giotto and Cimabue) and the splendour of Baroque churches decked in gold leaf. God is luminous. God is the gladdening light. God is weight and light at one and the same time. God through his glory grounds us and illumines us. It is through Him we have true knowledge. Our Christian faith again is grounded. It is rooted. It is not susceptible in itself to the comings and goings of men and women across the years - the same yesterday and today and for ever. (Hebrews 13.8) God does not change. God's glory is liberating, as it will always turn us from obsessing about ourselves to a celebration of life originating in Christ. Liberating us from

sin and death, from the old ways of humanity for the ever new ways of God in every generation. To be rooted in God gives us stability.

The Romanian priest being Orthodox naturally emphasised liturgical prayer, as I would as well. By the way there is a useful CofE app that all can download onto their mobile devices to join in the liturgical prayer of the church, while deepening our own personal prayer lives. Additionally, you can join us on Tuesday mornings in church for public prayer at 8.30 and on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 18.15 evenings on Zoom.

Before concluding I will let you in on a secret. I listened to Britney Spear's autobiography "The woman in me" not because I wanted to rediscover my feminine side, but because of the praise the book has received. Hers is, I don't need to tell you, a life full of ups and downs, especially the years under her father's controlling guardianship (conservatorship) of 13 years as an adult, but in the telling of her story Spears witnesses to God. It is God who carried her through the ordeal. God is literally her saviour. There was a presence she says, the presence of God going on to witness a number of times to the power of prayer. I would not have thought it possible that God and prayer would feature in her account, but there you are.

In one Gospel episode the 70 disciples Jesus commissions to tell the people that the kingdom of God has drawn close in Him – the Seventy return to him saying there were those they could not heal to which he replies such can only be driven out by fasting and prayer. There is no quick fix. It is through perseverance (Beharrlichkeit) that we advance in holiness and tied to courageous

perseverance in prayer (liturgical and personal) that change occurs. I must always be reminded of this.

Allow me one more addition, as it points in the same direction from another walk of life. Sports. You will have heard that Jürgen Klopp is leaving FC Liverpool after nine years as manager. Martin Samuel an English sports commentator wrote about his achievements, his drive, his gifts, his character, his love of Liverpool and the fans. The one thing he failed to mention is that Klopp is a devout Christian.

Klopp says,

To be a believer, but not to want to talk about it - I do not know how it would work! If anyone asks me about my faith, I give information.

Not because I have claim to be any sort of missionary. But when I look at me and my life - and I take time for that every day - then I feel I am in sensationally good hands.

When asked about what he would like to achieve before his contract at Liverpool runs out he replies

The problem is I'm a Christian that is not a problem, but the problem is I think other people can have success too - it's not about me. But if you ask me about Liverpool I would like to celebrate something each season.

How do I now loop the above back to glory the glory of which Jesus is and of the glory he has given us? Glory is something that uniquely belongs to God and any usurpation of that glory betrays us for who we are. To God give the glory great things he has done in the life of Britney Spears, Jürgen Klopp and I pray everyone here who knows and honours and lives a life in which we always seeking to know

what it means to be held in God's glory "the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." Amen.

What Does "Orthodoxy" Mean?

By Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

It is well-known among Orthodox Christians that the word orthodoxy—often used as a shorthand for our faith—has two parallel meanings. It is composed of two Greek words—orthos and doxa. Together, they form orthodoxia, rendered into English as orthodoxy. The word orthos literally means "straight," and those familiar with geometry will recognize it in the word orthogonal, which refers to something lying at a right angle. Those who know something about dentistry will think of orthodontics, which concerns itself with straight teeth, while the orthopedist wants to make sure your skeleton is straight (literally, orthopedics means "straight children"). It should come as no surprise that Greek uses orthos metaphorically also to refer to something that is true, since we English speakers use straight to refer to reliability and truth, especially in such terms as straight-talker or to be set straight. And of course someone who is on the right path is on the straight and narrow. And no doubt our minds are also called to the use of the word straight to refer to a properly ordered sexuality or even from a decade or two ago when straight referred to someone doesn't take recreational drugs.

The other side of the word orthodoxy is what may intrigue us more, however, and it is the doxa which gives orthodoxia its double meaning, **for doxa can mean both "opinion" and "glory."** Often, in thinking of orthodoxy, it is this first meaning that occurs to the world—an "orthodoxy" is a hard and fast, unmovable set of teachings or opinions. And this meaning should occur to us, as well, that Orthodoxy is very much about the straight, true teachings of the Church, teachings that cannot be changed. The orthodoxy of the Orthodox Church is therefore precisely a deposit of faith, a theology that will never be altered, because it is the truth. It is the straight teaching, the true opinion.

There is more to this side of doxa than "opinion" or "teaching," however. Doxa was used in the ancient world for many things. Indeed, its primary and most basic sense can be translated as "notion," especially with the question of whether that notion is true or false. From that, doxa can also be an "expectation," which makes particular sense if the truth value of a notion remains undefined. Thus, we may also know orthodoxy as a "true notion" and as a "true expectation." Doxa can also mean "a judgment" or "conjecture," which takes us into a more psychological realm. If you have a doxa about something, then of course that may be your idea or your opinion, your judgment about the character of the subject at hand.

But the inner sense of doxa is even more expansive than these almost purely philosophical definitions. There are also ancient uses of doxa that we may translate as "imagining," "a dream," "a fancy," or "a vision." It may be almost whimsical to think in these terms, but if you'll permit me a little mystical whimsy, consider for a moment that the Orthodox faith is also the "true imagining," the "true dream," or the "true fancy." I do not think that it will surprise you at all to learn that **Orthodoxy is also the "true vision."** We are accustomed to think of imagination, dreams, fancies and visions as unreliable, flimsy things, and that is perhaps why we need that orthos for

our doxa, to make it clear that this one doxa is the true one, the reliable one, the straight one.

So with that in mind, let us dream together a little more about this word orthodoxy. The other side of doxa with which we are perhaps familiar is that it means “glory.” This sense of doxa is derived from its meaning as “opinion,” and so doxa can be used to refer to the opinion that people have about something, its reputation, how it is esteemed. And so it is not a large leap from “reputation” to “glory,” for something with a good reputation is sure to be glorified. But glory does not only mean giving praise to something, and it is not limited in this way for doxa, either. The meaning extends on toward “effulgence” and even “splendor.” Thus, the Orthodox faith is also the “true reputation,” the “true splendor.” And we may say that it therefore implies “true worship,” because that glorification is directed toward the God of the universe, and it is His true splendor that shines through in Orthodox worship.

What a wonderful word orthodoxy is! On reflection, we must certainly agree that all of these varied senses of what the word might mean are all applicable to the Orthodox faith. Orthodoxy is certainly about what is straight and true, and the “what” there is not just a notion or opinion or teaching, but it is imagination, dream, vision, and (of course) glory and worship. No wonder that we say it is a whole life! It’s not just about believing the correct things.

*Fr. Andrew is an Antiochian author and speaker who blogs regularly at **Roads From Emmaus**.*