

Session Three Teaching Material and Handout

The Apostles and Their Ministry

We will need our Bibles constantly to hand, to look up the references and discuss as we go.

Prayer

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, who hast appointed divers Orders in thy Church: Give thy grace, we beseech thee, to all who are called to the same; and so fill them with the truth of thy doctrine, and endue them with purity of life, that they may faithfully serve thee, to the glory of thy Name and the benefit of thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

It is Julian of Norwich who reminds us that God has revealed to us just so much of Himself as is necessary for our salvation. "The rest is hidden and shut up from us." Perhaps in heaven we shall learn more, as we continue the "journey into love", as St Gregory of Nyssa, one of our great 4th century bishops, has described our eternal enjoyment of God. But here and now we must content ourselves with the images and symbols He has given us through Jesus our Lord in Holy Scripture: "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." (1 John 4, v.14) The iconic image will always lead us back through the Son to the Father, into whose family the Church we were admitted at baptism.

Recap

In Part 1 of this course we looked at the vocation of the twelve Apostles, commissioned by Christ to carry out certain specific duties, and receiving from Him the iconic image to enable them to do so. The passages to ponder on are the last few verses of St Matthew's gospel, and also St John's gospel, ch. 20, v.21-23.

An icon - let us keep reminding ourselves because we in the Western Church are not familiar with the idea – does not merely represent or stand in for an absent person. An icon makes the absent one present. So the Apostles make Christ present in the Church. And Christ, as the icon of the Father, makes the Father present: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14: 8,9)

Whatever next?

The Church expands, and the Apostles are overwhelmed with work. They cannot be everywhere at once, and their numbers are depleted through death. We must look in the New Testament to see how this problem was solved. There are clues all over the place.

Acts ch.6, v.1-6 is a good place to start, as it is widely seen as the beginning of the order of **Deacons**. It is worth looking at v.6 to see how they were commissioned to "serve tables." It sounds as if the Apostles were shunting off the more menial tasks onto them! But no. We remember Christ's words (Luke 22:27), "I am among you as one that serves." Another important passage is Luke 12:37. The Deacons were certainly doing Christ's own work. The first chapter of Titus tells us what sort of men the Deacons should be. Philippians is addressed to the Church with "the bishops and deacons."

So we pick up the word "**bishops**". It is not always clear in the NT whether "bishop" and "elder" are two words for the same person. For instance, Titus (1:5-7) is told to "ordain elders in every city...for a bishop must be blameless." So what is an "elder"? In the Greek NT the word is "**presbyter**" which translates as "**elder**" and which also gives us our word "**priest**". (A parish priest in the Roman Church lives in a presbytery.) James in his epistle (5:14) exhorts the sick to "call for the elders of the church". He assumes that there will be elders to call for.

The Bishop

Our word "bishop" comes from a Greek word meaning "**overseer**", the one in general overall charge. So did a missionary Apostle, having founded a church, ordain a number of elders from whom one was chosen and ordained to be the chief elder (bishop)? This could be the case with regard to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14. Or did he ordain a bishop (one would guess that Titus was the Bishop of Crete, as is generally assumed) who ordained elders?

In any case, this **Ministry of the Bishops, the Priests and the Deacons** can be described to be in place in the churches of the New Testament.