

The Commemoration of Edward Bouverie Pusey  
18 September 2020

Daily Reflection from the Bishop

*Stay Home. Stop the Spread. Save Lives.  
If you have to go out, wear a mask.  
Your mask is not a chin guard.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Many years ago, the late Henry Chadwick was telling stories to a group of us about the characters who had inhabited Christ Church, where for a decade from 1969 to 1979 he was dean of both college and cathedral. Among his best were stories about the eccentric Canon Claude Jenkins, the Professor of Ecclesiastical History, who occupied his professorship for almost 30 years.

In any case, Chadwick liked to tell a story about one of the canons of the cathedral who so disapproved E B Pusey and all that he stood for that, during processions in and out of the cathedral every day at Evensong, this particular canon made an obvious point of walking dramatically *around*, and not over, Pusey's grave like everyone else – Pusey and his wife are buried under a marble slab in the main aisle of the church.

The Catholic reform of the Anglican tradition has been so complete, at least in its outward expression, and the triumph of this reform is so splendidly shown in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (when used as it is meant to be used), that it is impossible for us in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to imagine how different the Church was at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No contemporary Anglican would be comfortable at all if the intervening years suddenly fell away, and we were once again in the Church before the Catholic Revival that began, at least symbolically, with Keble's famous Assize sermon in 1833. The buildings would be almost unrecognisable (though some examples of that kind of architecture remain, such as Christ Church, Alexandria), and the worship and habits would be foreign.

Yet the pilgrimage of the Church from those tentative days, when Pusey, Keble, Newman, and others worked to reveal the true Catholic foundation of the Church, especially in the re-commitment to the study of the Fathers and to a deeper Catholic ecclesiology and sacramental life, to the 1979 BCP 150 years later, is strewn with the debris of real fights in which people were often injured and priests imprisoned – over the use of vestments, the place where the celebrant would stand at the altar, the use of candles, and – horror of horrors – choirs in cassocks and surplices. The often outlandish costumes of many choirs these

days, as opposed to the classical vesture of cassocks and surplices, would have started a running battle in the streets.

Now, especially in this COVID season when all has been stripped away, we realise that it is hard to conceive of the kind of worship that satisfies without some basics: a weekly Eucharist; proper vestments for the clergy; candles on the altar; veils, frontals, falls, and dossals; processions on great feasts; incense (often or even just occasionally); and vested altar servers, readers, and choirs. Then there is the other stuff: the mixing of water with the wine in the chalice; taking care of the ablutions right after Holy Communion; the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in the church both for devotion as well as for the communion of the sick; the restoration of the use of holy oils in the administration of some sacraments; and the hearing of confessions. Before 1833 one would have seen none of this, and it took over a century for them, now so commonplace as to be unremarkable, to become established.

Pusey and his colleagues were treated frightfully by colleagues and others for their attempts to awaken the Church to its apostolic and patristic identity and its full sacramental life. The Church was not and could not, they asserted, be simply a religious decoration to a political system, and the Church's bishops could not be simply functionaries - or pawns - in governmental policies.

The reformed Catholic tradition that is lived by Anglicanism at its best has not *emerged* over the last 180 years smoothly and naturally; it has been patiently *built* by people like Pusey, who understood the true nature of the Church, and strove, often at huge personal and professional sacrifice, to enable that true nature to emerge. At its best, this reformed Catholic tradition has not been simply or solely "churchy;" its leaders, especially in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were those who went to the slums of the cities and who often spent lifetimes in one parish, trying to better the communities in which their churches were set. The late Kenneth Leech was one of the more recent heirs of this Anglican Catholic social commitment, and his books remain an important provocation to a Church so often indolent in this regard. This tradition has meant a vision of heaven and a pledge of freedom to the poor, to the black Church, and to so many groups who, like the great leaders of the Catholic movement in Anglicanism, were so often outcasts from "respectable" society.

Pusey would remind us that externals, as important as they may be, are not enough. The reformed Catholic faith of Anglicanism is not "Catholic lite" or "Presbyterians in vestments." It is not an "It-doesn't-matter-what-you-believe-affair." That kind of talk is cheap and untrue. It demeans the conviction of generations of reformers, and it actually deceives those who come to us in search of a living relationship with the living God.

On the contrary, Pusey and his disciples would remind us that the reformed Catholic faith of Anglicanism is Scriptural and patristic in its foundations, unique in its diverse cultural expressions, deeply concerned with the search for divine truth, and absolutely committed to the transformation of human society. That some have betrayed this inheritance by making the tradition too reactionary on the one hand, or too loosey-goosey on the other, cannot disguise its genius and its authenticity in its expression of the Christian faith. It is a faith for which, in the very recent past, people like Pusey were willing to suffer – and suffer so many did. And Pusey, called a saint by so many who knew him during his lifetime, passed the test of affliction to see the true identity of the Church revealed. And his collect is not a bad pandemic prayer.

*Grant, O God,  
that in all time of our testing  
we may know your presence and obey your will;  
that, following the example of your servant Edward Bouverie Pusey,  
we may with integrity and courage  
accomplish what you give us to do,  
and endure what you give us to bear;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

With love and prayers,

+ *Peter*

Diocese of Southeast Florida