

Sermon for Final Evensong
Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury, 690
Trinity Cathedral, September 23, 2012
The Rt. Rev. Kenneth L. Price Jr.

Actually, the Feast of Theodore of Tarsus is Sept 19, however I moved it today because there are aspects of Theodore's ministry that seem to relate to the ministry that you and I have shared these past three years,

He is said to have established a school and promoted learning

He visited all over England, endeavoring to bring together two strains of Christianity

He gave definitive boundaries to English dioceses and defined parishes

Although I cannot claim to have had any conscious modeling of my time here after Theodore, there are some similarities.

When I arrived, the vast majority of our deacons had chosen to follow Bishop Duncan and we had no seminarians, In addition, EFM classes had been suppressed. Thanks to the hard work of our Commission on Ministry we have reversed this desert of learning. Initially we borrowed from other dioceses but soon we began to raise up seminarians of our own and happily we ordained four to the priesthood and four as transitional deacons and also have five students actively studying for the diaconate, and EFM groups with more in the wings. Theodore with his commitment to learning would be proud of us,

Of the four dioceses which suffered splits, we not only ended up with more parishes than the others, but also with greater diversity in theology, politics and practice. Although I believe this characterization is too simple, in the case of San Joaquin, Fort Worth and Quincy, those who remained in the Episcopal Church were largely people who identified themselves as liberal or progressive. Here in Pittsburgh, we cover the spectrum and are more reflective the Episcopal Church as a whole. A goal of my time here has been to model and help us all to evidence that there is room for everyone in this church and that differences that we have are to be respected, honored and celebrated. I believe Theodore, with his commitment to bringing together different strains of Christianity would look favorably on our efforts here.

A lot of my time has been spent visiting in our parishes, both for formal Sunday visitations and for informal gatherings when we were able and to frequently open our home for the church to gather in as well.. With our shortage of ordained clergy, and meager resources we have had to develop some creative ways of supporting our parishes, but even so in the past three years we have established one brand new parish, reopened one that was closed and welcomed back from ACNA six (soon to be seven) others increasing our number from 28 to 36. Theodore.

Who laid the foundation of the parochial organization that still remains in the English Church would, I believe, bless our ongoing work in this area.

And so it is with great joy that I lift up the life of this great saint.

The fabric of our accomplishments together as bishop and people are spelled out in my bishop's report which you will receive at Convention and it will be posted on the web site, so I am not going to recount them here

As is my custom when preaching, I now direct you to the Scripture appointed for this lesser feast. for I believe it speaks directly to us in this diocese,

In the second lesson from Timothy, which Eric read to us, we have some rich imagery. Paul first addresses us a child, reminding us that no matter how old we are, we are still children when it comes to matters of faith, like a child hungry for knowledge, we are called to remain eager to grow in our faith through regular study of Scripture and interaction with each other. And in our baptismal covenant, we promise to continue in the fellowship of the grace of Jesus Christ and, by word and example, to impart what we learn to others. This is pretty basic and easy for us to relate to. It is what goes on in our church life day in and day out. It is in the simplest terms, our marching orders as Christians.

Next Paul invites us to share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers have been part of society from early times. In this day of technology and instant communication, the sufferings of war and of those who return from war bruised and broken are vividly held before us each night on the nightly news. We grieve for their suffering.

This diocese has had more than its share of suffering in recent years as well. Perhaps not to the same extent as a soldier who loses a limb, our diocese has suffered from loss of limbs as well. Hopefully this has not been just for human gain for if so, it has all been for naught. Rather, hopefully, we have endured this suffering in order we could continue to be loyal to our true "enlisting officer, "that is no one other than Jesus Christ our Lord.

We here in Pittsburgh can really relate to Paul's next example. We love our sports teams and their athletes. And we know the importance of competing according to the rules. This commitment to following the rules translates to our diocese. One reason we have a legal committee that meets weekly is our intense desire to play by the rules, to always tell the truth and to be fair, even with those who disagree with us or seem to not be playing by the rules. These are strange times for us being in an adversarial position with former colleagues and friends. One of the things that has pained us is the ongoing perpetration of falsehoods about the Episcopal Church. In this lesson we are reminded to be as strong as soldiers and as fair as honest athletes as we go about the task of rebuilding our diocese.

Why do we do this? The last sentence of our Epistle says it all. “**For salvation and eternal life.**” It is not about obtaining an earthly or human victory, but rather for the very sake of our eternal souls.

Now let’s shift to the Gospel lesson from Matthew that Ben read for us. All too often things catch us off guard. As I have listened to the stories of so many of you of recent years, I sense that the split that occurred caught many of you off guard. Toward the end, you saw the direction your former bishop was taking this diocese, but if you had known more earlier, perhaps the thief of division would not have broken in.

When disaster occurs, our resiliency checks in and usually we rise to the occasion to repair the damage. During Bishop Johnson’s and my time with you, we have all been in a bit of repair mode. This has certainly been an overarching feeling with the churches that have returned to us. Chancellor Roman and Property Manager Gundersen as well as the Canons and I have spent far more time on repair matters than is the norm in most dioceses. I fear this will continue into Bishop McConnell’s episcopacy as well. It is part of the aftermath of disaster. But in time the repair work will decrease and hopefully you will never have to return to this stage again.

In fact, it is essential that now you move into a place where you can put the distractions of division behind you for you need to direct all your attention, your energy, your creativity into preparing the world around you to receive Jesus Christ when he returns in glory. I am not going to make any comparison of what you have gone through to Matthew’s last image of eating and drinking with drunkards, for I honestly believe most of those who followed Bishop Duncan did so out of genuine sense of wishing to prepare for Jesus Christ as well. In fact I might go so far as to say that I believe it is important that you do all you can to reconcile with those brothers and sisters (even if you cannot reunite with them) so that all of us can be ready when the Master returns.

When I first arrived three years ago, my charge from the Standing Committee was to (much like Theodore) “exercise the gifts of grace and wisdom that God had imparted to me over my 15 years as a bishop to help establish unity where there had been division and order where there had been chaos.” Although the Standing Committee and Bishop Johnson had done yeoman’s work, many of my initial gatherings with you still focused on the hurts and woundedness that had encompassed you. Well, now three years later, I believe we have worked together pretty well and happily our gatherings now are more focused on the future, and the opportunities it holds. Oh, there are still challenges, some pretty large ones, but now with Bishop McConnell as part of your team, I am convinced that this diocese will continue to regain strength and power in the Spirit.

In closing, let me speak for Mariann as well as myself in thanking you all for welcoming us into your midst in this fragile time in your lives. Your love and support for us, and your responsiveness to the healing I have endeavored to bring has been overwhelming... and a

testimony to your inner strength. I am convinced that all will be right with you in years to come and that one day Dorsey and Betsy McConnell will be able to stand in this pulpit of our beloved Cathedral and look back as Mariann and I are now and be satisfied that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is firmly and visibly in the center of this diocese.

Let me end with words from the collect for Theodore of Tarsus which we will repeat shortly.

“Create in thy Church, we pray thee, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, such godly union and concord that it may proclaim both by word and example, the Gospel of the Price of Peace...”

Amen