

The Glory of God

Isaiah 44 vv 6-8 p729, Romans 8 vv 12-25 p1134, Matthew 13 vv 24-43 p979

We are welcoming today Fr Dobromir Dimitrov of the Bulgarian Orthodox community. He will be presiding at a celebration of the Orthodox liturgy here at St Michael's after this service. What is the Orthodox Church? I could talk about the differences between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West and the differences between Catholics and Protestants and about how we Anglicans may consider ourselves to be both Catholic and Protestant and perhaps, at the same time, to look to Orthodoxy for a model of what it might mean to believe in *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*, without necessarily accepting the Roman view that the pope, the Bishop of Rome, has some sort of universal primacy over the whole Church. I could talk about differences in doctrine, differences in the way we conduct our services, the history of our divisions from one another, schism, and our subsequent histories as more or less separate churches. Some of us have experienced the Bulgarian Orthodox services here at St Michael's and I know that we are all welcome to take part. To take part would be the best way to find out more. Thank you, Fr Dobromir.

I don't want to do that, however. I mean I don't want to emphasise our differences and the reasons for schism. I have very much appreciated sharing in the Orthodox liturgy here at St Michael's and occasionally elsewhere. I do believe in *one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church*. There is only one Church and that Church consists of everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ and is baptised in His Name. There is just one Church and it is made up of all Christian people on earth and in Heaven. Jesus Himself prayed that we might be one and our divisions surely grieve Him. He commanded us Christians to love one another as He loves us. God is love. What unites us as Christian people is infinitely more important than what separates us. There is a division between the Church and the world – between those who believe in Jesus and those who don't – but we are taught: *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. If we love God in Jesus Christ, if we love one another as He loves us, we grow into His likeness, we in Him and He in us, and we too love the peoples of the world, because God does, and we long for their redemption in Christ. If we know God, we know Him by His grace. We do not therefore feel superior to those who do not yet know Him but we do have an urgent desire to bring them to the knowledge of God, Whom to know is eternal life.

God is love and Christ's commandment is that we should love one another as He loves us; His prayer is that we should be one. There are genuine differences between Christians, between churches and within churches, but love must always be the guiding principle. St Paul talks about speaking the truth in love. Truth is of the greatest importance. Jesus Himself is the Way, the Truth and the Life, but Truth cannot be Truth in the absence of love for God is love. We Christians let ourselves down badly not necessarily when we disagree. Sometimes our integrity requires us to maintain what we believe to be the truth even at the cost of disagreement with our fellow Christians. We Christians do, however, let ourselves down very badly when we cease to love one another, even those with whom we disagree. There is one God, as we have just read in Isaiah, and He is love. What is not of love is of the Devil and he, Jesus says, is the Father of lies. Truth is not compatible with hatred or even with indifference towards one another. Ephesians 4¹⁵ *But speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:* ¹⁶ *From whom the whole*

body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

God has revealed Himself to us in very many different ways. God is infinite and it is beyond our capacity truly to know Him except that He makes Himself known to us. In Christ, all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Given our human failings, I think it is possible that God has revealed different aspects of His glory to different Christian bodies. I once saw it suggested that evangelical Protestants had a particular depth of understanding of Good Friday, that the Roman Catholics majored on the Ascension, that the Orthodox were the Easter people and that, perhaps, we Anglicans were most at home at Christmas. The Cross, on which Jesus in His self-sacrifice of love conquers all the powers of the Evil One; Christ's eternal reign in glory, living for ever to make intercession for us until He comes again to judge the living and the dead; His triumph over sin the world and the devil in His glorious Resurrection; God with us Emmanuel; they are all essential aspects of Christian belief and it would be a great mistake to think that any of us had a monopoly of any of them, but what God has entrusted to us, He has revealed to us for us to share with the whole church and, indeed, with the whole world, from which it follows that we all need one another if we are to be the whole people of God.

So what is Orthodoxy. The *ortho* bit of the word means right. An orthodontist puts your teeth right. An orthopaedic surgeon puts your bones right. Orthodoxy is about what is right and straight in our faith. What about the *dox* part? Very often *dox* refers to opinion or belief or ideas. It comes from the Greek δοξα, which in classical Greek does mean notion or opinion or judgment, something like that, and it is indeed important to be true and to be truthful and to seek the Truth as it is revealed in Christ. In the New Testament, however, δοξα means glory. We often sing a doxology at the end of a hymn or a psalm or say or sing a doxology on its own. A doxology glorifies God. *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.*

It has been suggested that, when we use the word *orthodox* in a Christian context, we ought to be thinking less about doctrine than about glory. I hope Fr Dobromir won't tell me that I am wrong here. Doctrine is what we believe about God. When we think about what we know of God, we are moved to praise. We glorify Him. We worship Him. *We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.* The essence of orthodoxy is worship. We are all orthodox in that, through His grace and by His grace alone, we know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent. *Day by day: we magnify thee; And we worship thy Name: ever world without end.*

When the children of Israel had escaped out of Egypt and passed through the Red Sea, God led them to Mt Sinai. Moses alone went up to the top of the mountain where God gave him the law, beginning with the Ten Commandments. God also showed Moses something of the worship of heaven which was to become the pattern for the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle and for the Temple in Jerusalem. The worship on earth offered by the people of

God was to reflect the worship of heaven. This is what we seek to do in our liturgy. We seek to reflect the worship of Heaven. We proclaim the glory of God. We exalt His holy Name. We bow down before Him. We intercede for the Church and for the world. We plead the eternal sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the whole world. We sing the songs of angels and archangels, of cherubim and seraphim. We preach the eternal Gospel and teach the eternal Truth. But what I've just said is not quite right. Yes, we seek, by the grace of God, to do all those things as we meet in awe and love, in holy fear, but also in the intimacy of a child with his mother or a bridegroom with his bride, but we do more than seek to reflect the worship of heaven. By His grace, we participate in the worship of Heaven. *Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen. We praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud : the heavens, and all the powers therein. To thee Cherubin and Seraphin : continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy : Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty : of thy glory. The glorious company of the Apostles : praise thee. The goodly fellowship of the Prophets : praise thee. The noble army of Martyrs : praise thee. The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee; The Father : of an infinite Majesty; Thine honourable, true : and only Son; Also the Holy Ghost : the Comforter.*

This participation in the worship of Heaven is what we do when we meet together in His Name, on the Lord's Day, to fulfil His commandment to *Do this in remembrance of me*. When we share in the Holy Communion, when we celebrate the Eucharist, we remember all that Jesus has done for us and we anticipate what He promises us in all eternity; we are nourished by His Body and Blood; by His grace, we are at one with Him and He is at one with us, He in us and we in Him. We are therefore members of one another. This participation in the worship of Heaven, this participation in Christ makes us the people that we are. So our worship overflows from what we are doing here and now in the eucharistic fellowship of the Church into lives of praise. In response to God's love for us and by the grace which He gives to us, we offer our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice. Our whole lives are an extension of our Sunday Eucharist, a participation in the worship of Heaven. Our is the life in the Holy Spirit, the life of the children of God of which our reading from Romans speaks. There is so much which could be said on these subjects, but it's much more important to live these truths than just to talk about them. So I'll close with a quotation from our New Testament lesson. We've been talking about the glory of God, the glory of Christ. Note how St Paul says that we shall be glorified with Him, if we suffer with Him. The Christian life is not easy, but it is glorious. *Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia! Following our exalted head, Alleluia! Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!*

From Romans 8: ¹⁴ *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

¹⁵ *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

¹⁶ *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*

¹⁷ *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*