

is easily identified in this Enthronement Service - the theme of ministry of God's people feeding the flock committed to their charge.

And I want to ask you to think with me about this theme this afternoon - not in a purely historic fashion, or even in a purely theological fashion. I want you to think with me about this whole question of our task and our ministry under three simple headings, and I want to start by suggesting to you that the greatest task we have as a Church and as a people in the 1980's is this: to re-discover the value of the individual.

You and I live in a time in the history of our country and in the history of our Church when the individual is not a priority in any sense, and we have grown accustomed to consider people in a community, people in a Church, people in a country, people in a Province en masse, as a group.

And how often are we advised by those who are undoubtedly set up to advise us in these matters that the good of the community demands such and such, or the good of the people requires this or that.

Is it any wonder that at times you and I wonder where the dignity and the rights and the power of the individual have gone? And it ~~may~~ would be all right from a purely Church sense, wouldn't it, if that were to be the end of the matter. But it is, as we know to our cost, unfortunately, not the end of the matter, because so often within the Church we tend to lose sight of the right and the influence of the individual.

And I would suggest to you this afternoon that if there is anything that history will lay at our feet in our generation in the Church, it must surely be this - that we have failed miserably to grasp the importance in a very chaotic and

changing world, of the value of the individual - that priceless commodity in the sight of God, made in the image of Christ, made in the image of God and that, the individual for whom Christ died.

And yet how often do we lose sight of the value of the individual as someone who has so much to offer, so much to contribute and so much to reflect within the life of the community and of the Christian Church.

In the past decade we have seen many things change in our Province, and may I suggest to you that one thing that has changed, ~~perhaps~~ perhaps almost without us noticing it, has been that the individual in our community, the individual person has lost a great sense of his identity.

How often does an elderly person say to their clergyman in a pastoral visit, "You know things have changed; they are not what they used to be. I felt once that I was important, but now I feel more a number on a list."

How often do we hear the medical practitioner complain: "You know I wish I had more time to follow up an individual case because a person is important, but now the pressure is such that I have so many to deal with that I am not concerned with the individual."

And have we not as Christians this afternoon, at this particular juncture in the history of our Province, a right and a duty to say something very clearly to Government. In the next few weeks they will issue a blue print for the future of our Province. We have received many indications as to what that blue print will contain.

It is not our duty this afternoon to tell the Government what should be in the blue print, but surely it is our duty

PAGE 51 23 062

4 Sermon

as Christian people - and in this congregation representing so many people in the Diocese, we have a right to say: "Look, if in your plans you lose sight of the rights and the dignity of the individual in the community you have not even begun to understand Ulster, and you certainly have not begun to solve our problems."

And, so I suggest first of all that we must be conscious again of the rights and dignities of the individual.

Secondly, may I suggest to you that in our work, "feeding the flock of Christ," whatever it may mean for us, and whatever it may hold for us in the future, we not only must think of the individual, but we must see the individual as a reflection of God.

I choose my words carefully, because there are those, I know, who would teach us within the Church that too often do we confuse in our thinking the dignity of man and the dignity of God.

And, no doubt, there will be those who will tell me after this sermon that I have done the same. I hope not, because I would say to you, my friends, this afternoon that we are moving into a period in the history of the Church when we have got to recognise again that in the vision of the individual we have a reflection of the Creator.

And if there is one message that this Province needs to be reminded of to-day, surely it is - that when we look at our neighbour, when we deal with our neighbour, when we have relations with our neighbour, we are having relations, not with the faceless anonymous man we sometimes imagine from the media - we are dealing with an individual made in the likeness of God.

5 Sermon

It is a rather frightening thought, it is a rather devastating thought, and may I suggest to you that it is a rather devastating thought to a Church which considers itself strong.

I want to be very personal about this, and I hope you will not misunderstand me. In my previous Diocese it was remarkable on the number of occasions when we felt that the task given to us was unique — for this reason, we were a minority ~~■~~ within a majority situation, but within Northern Ireland.

And for that reason may I say to you who have the privilege of worshipping in a totally majority situation, that there is a very heavy moral responsibility to recognise that we have not got all the answers; we have not got all the solutions, and that we have got to have the same thought and prayer for those who think like us, but who worship their God in very different situations, under very different pressures, and who seek the same way as we do.

We must learn surely again what it means to look on the individual as the image of God, made in the likeness of God, and to recognise what this means for our ministry.

At the last Lambeth Conference, as I think I mentioned at Downpatrick, I met that powerful character who has been in the news lately, Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, the man who was imprisoned the other day (I am sure you read about it in the papers) because of his opposition to apartheid — a man whose very presence vibrates, I was going to say tension, but people might misunderstand me if I said that, certainly radiates and transmits pent-up energy.

And I remember him describing the events in Soweto, that shanty town in South Africa, which for many people was the flash-point which set off the current troubles, and he used

a phrase which I have never forgotten. He said: "In that restless situation we discovered again what it meant to be urgent about God's business."

"Urgent about God's business!" My friends, if there is a lesson in that for us in Northern Ireland and in our Church and in our community, surely it is this: the time is long past when we can afford to be anything other than urgent about God's business.

To sit back and to say it is the job of ^{the} a comfortable pew, as in fact some clergy are inclined to do, or to sit back in the comfortable pew and say it is the job of the pulpit, as so often some of our good lay people say; or to sit back on the touch-line and say it is the job of the Church, as those outside our doors are too often inclined to say, is surely nothing short of begging the question: "What is the ministry given to those who use the word Christ to-day?"

And surely the answer is a simple one: "To be urgent about God's business," but to ~~realise~~ recognise that we are not dealing with a massed people, we are dealing with individuals made in the image and the likeness of God.

Thirdly, and finally, may I suggest to you that we must see the job of feeding the sheep of Christ - firstly, recognising the power of the individual; secondly, the individual in the sight of God as made in the image of God; and thirdly, and perhaps most important of all, we must see the ministry of Christ's Church to the individual people where they are.

One of the penalties of being appointed or translated Bishop of Down and Dromore at this time of the year is that you have a succession of appointments. Two enthronements, followed very quickly by a Diocesan Synod, and it leaves, I can assure you, at times some sort of mental exhaustion when you contemplate - not what you have to say, but how you can divide up what you want to say.

7 Sermon

And I would like to feel that at the Diocesan Synod we may take this whole process one step further and ask ourselves what does it mean, the organisation of our Diocese in the 1980's - that we have certain problems, we have certain resources. How are we going to make the best ~~use~~ of the ministry?

I have certain suggestions I want to put to you. But may I suggest to you this afternoon in the context of our ministry to the individual, to the person, and being urgent about the business of God,

The first step in this entire process is a very simple one. We minister because we feel convinced that we have something worthwhile to talk about - we have something worthwhile to talk about.

Have you ever wondered, my friends, my clergy colleagues, have you ever wondered at times in those barren moments we all have in our spiritual life when nothing seems to click and vision is gone. Did you ever wonder why? Did you ever ask yourself on your knees: "Why is it in God's name the vision seems to have gone?"

And you, my ~~own~~ friends, who represent the parishes, have you ever asked yourself on your knees: "What is wrong with my Parish? What is wrong with my Church?"

How often in both cases do we come up with a similar answer - it starts with me and it ends with me. How will they hear unless we send a preacher? How will they learn unless we send a teacher? How will they experience unless those who teach and preach have experienced it ~~first~~ first themselves? How?

We speak to-day not only as a Christian people to a troubled world, but we speak as members of the Church of Ireland. We speak as those who have a certain ethos, a certain way of doing things.

I have already, I think, suggested to you at the first enthronement at Downpatrick that I would like to feel that we may together find a new way of making attractive the traditional way the Church of Ireland has of organising itself. But ~~we~~ we will never start that process, we will never feed the sheep, and we will never discover in the sight of God how important the individual is unless we ~~we~~ ourselves have made our own trip from Gethsemane to Calvary to Easter, and in that pilgrimage have simply and quietly said to the God we seek to serve: "Here am I, send me."

We start a pilgrimage to-day together, my friends. I have come to learn - I have come to learn from you. I hope that what experience I have may be of use to you. But at the end of the day it is not as the Diocese of Dromore that we will be judged; it is as individuals - important because we are people.

Secondly, because we reflect the image of God. But, thirdly, because we are a people who feel a burning desire in our hearts to say to others: "Come walk with me for I have a secret I want to share." And that surely is our ministry and our calling now in the 1980's and beyond.

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast called us into Thy Church and given us the privilege of service and leadership, pour into our hearts such a love towards Thee that we show in this community and beyond the beauty of Thy Name, and draw through us others closer to Thee in and through Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

End.