

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

September 25, 2011

**“THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:
THE EASTERN, THE WESTERN, THE BRITISH”
(Lancelot Andrewes, 1555-1626)**

Back when I entered the Anglican Catholic Church and was given a chance to choose a confirmation name, the name of someone who would serve as a model and source of inspiration for my life as a priest, the choice to me was obvious: Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, the notable Anglican Divine who served as a Court Preacher in the latter half of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and throughout that of her successor, King James I, and died on this day, September 25th, 1626. There are many reasons Bishop Andrewes should be remembered and held dear. On this, his day, I would lift up three: he was a Man of the Word, a Man of Prayer, and a Man of the Church.

I.

First, a man of the Word. It has been noted that the reign of James I, not the most admirable in a number of ways, “witnessed the production of three of the world’s great masterpieces, Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, [Lord] Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, and the Authorized Version of the Bible” (Higham). The last was the most consequential. When James acceded to the request for a new translation, which request came in fact from the Puritans, he turned first of all to Lancelot Andrewes, who was skilled in the oriental languages, especially Hebrew, and made him responsible for the team of scholars that translated the first half of the Old Testament, from Genesis through II Kings. Enconced in the ancient Jerusalem chamber of Westminster Abbey, “Andrewes and his colleagues drenched themselves anew in the pages of the Old Testament, and told again the great story of Creation which never ceased to be for him a special source of wonder and worship. The figures of the Patriarchs, the journey through the wilderness, Israel’s anointed Kings, seemed at times more real than the life which went on beyond the Abbey precincts.” The King James Version, as it is popularly known, was published in the year 1611, thus 500 years ago this year. Florence Higham, one of Andrewes’ biographers, wrote, “One cannot be sufficiently thankful that just at the time when the English language was

at its finest and most expressive and when the spiritual faculties of its most learned practitioners were exceptionally acute, a King should ordain and see accomplished this mighty undertaking.” The impact of the King James Version of scripture upon the life and language of English speaking people around the world is simply beyond telling!

But it was not as a translator alone that Andrewes was a man of the Word. For years, both before and after, he was renowned as the greatest preacher of the time, and a preacher whose sermons clung closely to their biblical text. They are little read today, however, not that sermons are ever terribly exciting reading. T.S. Eliot said, “His sermons are too well built to be readily quotable; they stick too closely to the point to be entertaining. Yet they rank with the finest English prose of his time, of any time.” Andrewes was described as “‘an angel in the pulpit’ [who] drove home to all sorts and conditions of men the fundamental truths of the Gospel” (Higham). Another biographer wrote that, due to his profound knowledge of the Scriptures, he caught “some measure of ‘the spirit of revelation’; a deep and strong sense of the range and comprehensiveness of Christian truth; a perception of the bearing of one department of truth on another, of the relations that subsist between different doctrines, above all of their moral claim and elevating influence on men” (Ottley). In his instructions for the preachers he urged them to “deliver the word . . . with authority, gravity and majesty; as knowing that it is not [their] own word, but the everlasting truth of God” (Reidy). Likewise to the congregation he counseled, “After we hear the word of God we should get us out of the noise about us, and withdraw ourselves some whither, where we might be by ourselves, that when we have heard [God] speak to us, we might hear what He would speak in us.” And so he would encourage us to take time after we leave these hallowed precincts to reflect in quiet on what was said and done here, to meditate upon God’s truth, and in its light to examine our lives. Andrewes wrote, “The only true praise of a sermon is, some evil left, or some good done upon the hearing of it.”

Before we pass on we should note that for all of the importance Andrewes attached to the sermon, he also stressed that it does not stand alone. “The sermon is by no means the center, nor the whole of our liturgy, for there is no fullness of our Liturgy without the Sacrament. Some part, yea the chief part is wanting, if that be wanting.”

II.

We note, secondly, that Andrewes was a Man of Prayer; indeed, it is for his book of prayers that he is most remembered. John Henry Newman was deeply impressed by Andrewes' *Private Devotions*, published a translation of them in *The Tracts for the Times* and kept a copy of them on his prayer desk right up to the time of his death, 45 years after he left the Anglican Church. That gives you an idea of the catholicity of their appeal. To give you a taste of the prayers, a sense of their thoroughness, and an intimation of their benefit, you will find a copy of his morning prayer in your bulletin. You can see the beauty of both the words and the thoughts when he considers the end of his life and prays, "A Christian close, without sin, without shame, and, should it please Thee, without pain, and a good answer at the dreadful and fearful judgment-seat of Jesus Christ our Lord, Vouchsafe O Lord," and when in penitence he prays to the Lord, "Look on me with those eyes with which Thou didst look upon Magdalene at the feast, Peter in the hall, the thief on the wood." You can read the rest.

The prayers were not intended for publication and their deepest impression was on Andrewes himself. Florence Higham put it well,

The hours of prayer with which he began his day seemed to clothe him in a garment of sanctity and amid so much that was hollow and petty and vicious, his charity and kindness in human relationships made men at once ashamed and thankful. And always through the discordant noises of the court and the sweet harmonies of his own spiritual life, there sounded the ground bass of the Old Testament Scriptures, conditioning alike his worship and his thought.

III.

If we focused only on Andrewes as a Man of the Word and a Man of Prayer, we might leave the impression that religion was for him an individual matter, between him and his God. Nothing could be further from the truth. The prayers alone are enough to disabuse us of that idea. He was a Man of the Church and drank deeply from its ancient sources and chief writers through the ages. Thus did he have a deep and expansive understanding of the Church and prayed, "For the Catholic Church [the whole Church], its establishment and increase; for the Eastern, its deliverance and union; for the Western [that is, the Roman], its adjustment and peace; for the British [the Anglican], the supply of what is wanting in it, the strengthening of what remains in it" (Newman trans., "Second Day"). Or again, "For the Catholic Church: for the

churches throughout the world, their truth, unity and stability, to wit: in all let charity thrive, truth live: for our own church: that the things that are wanting therein may be supplied, that are not right be set in order” (Brightman trans., “A Second Form of Morning Prayer”).

In trying to sum up the faith of the Anglican Church in this broader context, Andrewes said famously, “We have one canon of the Scriptures given us by God, two Testaments, three creeds [the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian], the first four councils, and the fathers of the first five centuries for our rule of religion.” (In the Anglican Catholic Church we think that is a little too neat and express our commitment to all seven of the ecumenical councils of the undivided Church, but the essence is the same.) In the light of this commitment to the historic faith, Andrewes could say in conversation with a noted Roman Catholic layman

that he held the English Protestant Catholic Church, and the Roman Catholic Church, to be one and the same Church of Christ, forasmuch as he might conceive the fundamental points of faith, and the substantial worship and service of God; that we were both . . . the same house of God; and that the only question between us both was, in very deed, and might justly be, whether that part of the house wherein they dwelt, or else the other part which we inhabit, were the better swept, and the more cleanly kept, and more substantially repaired. (Reidy).

He did think that Rome had an “over-articulated” creed, “based on the unwarranted assumption that God has given us in His Church what as a matter of fact He has withheld, namely, authoritative guidance on all or most of the subjects which are matters of inquiry or dispute among religious men” (Ottley), in other words, that Rome has given definitive answers on things that have not been definitively revealed

Andrewes was not a polemicist and did not like controversy, though as the pre-eminent theologian of his age, and that an antagonistic age, he was of necessity engaged in a good deal of controversy. He was by nature a conciliator and man of peace. He would ever pray for “the Catholic Church: Eastern, Western and our own.” His catholicity of spirit has made him an attractive figure to many in various parts of the Church, the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic. It is interesting that one of the best books on his theology was written by a Jesuit, Maurice Reidy, and that a number of years before the Second Vatican Council. It is with a quotation from that book that I wish to conclude. He wrote,

Lancelot Andrewes did not win fame among his contemporaries by preaching novel doctrine, nor simply because he happened on a style which tickled the fancy of the moment and set a fashion others tried to imitate, nor again because he knew how to flatter two vain monarchs for whom adulation was the spice of life; but rather because he preached with tremendous conviction truths which in the last two thousand years have come nearest to satisfying the longings in the hearts of men and closest to providing a way out of the perpetual confusions into which they persist in throwing themselves. Year after year he took the old orthodox truths of the honored creeds of Christendom, touched them with the genius of a fertile imagination, soaked them in the rich flavor of his own sincerity, and preached them with a brilliance and a striking directness which left his hearers impressed, if not always improved.

Let us for our part, however, never cease to be improved by these ancient truths.

Sermon preached by the Rev'd Fr. Voris G. Brookshire at the Anglican Catholic Church of Saint John the Theologian, Pompano Beach, FL, on the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 25, 2011. Copyright © 2011.