

**SERMON PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF
THE ENTHRONEMENT OF
THE RT. REV. DR. HOWARD K. A. GREGORY
AS THE 14TH BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF JAMAICA AND THE
CAYMAN ISLANDS, ON ASCENSION DAY, MAY 17, 2012**

The Bidding Prayer

WE SHALL PRAY for Christ's Holy Catholic Church, especially for the Anglican Communion, and more especially for the Church in Jamaica and The Cayman Islands in the Province of the West Indies; and herein do we pray for **ROWAN**, Archbishop of Canterbury; **JOHN**, Archbishop of the West Indies; Your humble servant, Bishop of this Diocese; **ROBERT**, Bishop Suffragan; **NEVILLE, ALFRED, WILLIAM** and **HAROLD**, (retired Bishops).

WE SHALL PRAY also for all Ministers of God's Word and Sacraments, whether Bishops, Priests and Deacons, for the Deaconesses and Church Army Officers of this Diocese; and for all the members of the Laity in their several vocations, that all may be faithful stewards in the service of God.

WE SHALL PRAY for the nations of the world, especially for the British Commonwealth, and more especially for our own nation and people; and herein do we pray for Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, for the Governor General her representative, for the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, for the Ministers of Government, the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, and for all who bear office, that all our people may live to the glory of God and in brotherly love one towards another, remembering the solemn account that all of us must finally make.

WE SHALL PRAY for the unemployed, the poor, the sick, the permanently injured, and all those who are suffering for one reason or another, that in the midst of adversity, they may still call upon God as their ultimate helper and deliverer, and that those who are not of such may be ever moved to assist in the relief of their wants and sufferings.

FINALLY, WE SHALL PRAY for all those who have departed this life in the faith and fear of God; and that He may so give us who are alive grace, that we may follow their good examples and, this life ended, be partakers with them of the glorious resurrection of life everlasting.

NOW, WE SUM UP OUR PRAYERS IN THE PRAYER THAT OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF HAS TAUGHT US, SAYING:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
 Hallowed be thy Name.
 Thy Kingdom come.
 Thy will be done in earth,
 As it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our trespasses,
 As we forgive them that trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 But deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom,
 The power, and the glory,
 For ever and ever.
Amen.

Acknowledgements

I want to use the opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the people of this Diocese for the tremendous honour which you have bestowed on me in electing and confirming me as the 14th Bishop of this Diocese. It is truly a humbling experience, as anyone who has a sense of the awesome nature of this responsibility, will know that no one is ever qualified for this office, and that your decision is as much an expression of an act of faith, as my acceptance of the responsibility, being fully aware as I am, that it is only by the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and your prayers and support that I will be able to make a meaningful contribution to the life of this Church.

I give thanks to God who has guided the course of my life from my days as a little boy in the District of Cavaliers in the hills of St. Andrew, through tragedies and successes, through faith and doubt, through the discernment of a call to ordained ministry from my early teenage years, and through several pastoral assignments up to this moment and to this office.

I also want to give thanks for those who have given birth to me, now deceased, and the wider family of origin, and of the church which have nurtured me as a person and in the faith, so that I could grow as an individual and in this vocation. Here I pay special tribute to my wife, Charmaine, and my daughter Renee, and remember with gratitude and affection those loved ones who have gone on before.

Finally, I am fully cognizant that I come to this office, not as a pioneer or trailblazer, but with a deep appreciation and sense of reverence at the fact that I enter into a legacy bequeathed to me by my predecessors, and, if I may use an image from St. Paul, I must now do my part to water and to tend the seeds which have been sown, and thus build on their legacy.

John 17:1 and 11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you...

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

I want to suggest that the acknowledgement of endings and the bidding of farewell can be a very unsettling, if not painful moment. The pop group Boyz 11 Men captures something of this feeling in its hit song: **SO HARD TO SAY GOODBYE TO YESTERDAY**

Boyz 11 Men

How do I say goodbye to what we had?

The good times that made us laugh

Outweigh the bad.

I thought we'd get to see forever

But forever's gone away

It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday.

I don't know where this road

Is going to lead.

All I know is where we've been

And what we've been through.

If we get to see tomorrow

I hope it's worth all the wait

It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday.
And I'll take with me the memories
To be my sunshine after the rain
It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday.

But, far from being only a moment in which the experience of vulnerability is the overriding feeling, the ending or farewell encounter can be a moment of creative and unselfish concern, and also signify new beginnings and possibilities. In such moments, the one whose departure is imminent may move outside of a pre-occupation with self, and focus instead on the welfare and well-being of those being left behind. A good example of this is provided for us by terminally ill persons who know that they are going to die soon, and who have resolved the sense of loss and anguish brought on by the narrowing of life's boundaries. That is, once they have come to terms with the loss of their life plan for achievement and longevity, the loss of a future with their children and grand-children, and have come to a sense of resolution of their issues of anger with God for what is happening to them, and can see God's involvement, even in this sense of seeming tragedy, they can now turn to unselfish social sensitivity. The well-being of family and spouse can become a point of focus rather than individual withdrawal. The dying person can now talk freely to those who dare to listen, what is to happen to the children and how they are to live when the dying one is gone, and even if the spouse should re-marry, sometimes even naming who the surviving spouse should marry.

In the passage from which the text comes, Jesus faces a moment with his disciples which is tinged with all of the elements of an ending and farewell, as he is confronted by the reality of his own impending death, and seeks to make his disciples a part of this very personal journey. The text, which is part of this shared moment with his disciples, falls within a passage referred to as Jesus' Farewell Discourse (Exhortation) which runs from John chapter 14 to chapter 17. Here Jesus, having worked through issues of God's plan and his mission, and having been reconciled to it by his life of obedience, pointing inevitably to suffering and death, he now expresses a deep concern for his disciples – the unselfish concern. And yet, it is obvious that this apparent moment of ending, is also pointing to a new beginning, as it represents a moment of glory – “Father, the hour has come, glorify thy Son....” The interesting thing to note is that the moment of glory represents a moment when many forget about social awareness, and even forget about

those who helped them along the road to achieve the glory. By way of contrast, Jesus in his moment of glory prays for his disciples. But what is this moment really about? And this question must be treated with some seriousness as this text is one among various options chosen for Ascensiontide, and which therefore points, in an anticipatory manner, to the departure of the risen Lord in his resurrected state from among the disciples, and his ascension to glory, where he is seated at the right hand of the Father, there to make intercession for the faithful, even as he makes provision for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit with the faithful. In answer then to the question of the significance of this moment, I want to offer a number of suggestions:

1. It represents a moment of consecration, a dedication of the whole person to the service of God, a setting apart.

Consecration of whom, we may ask? This passage has been referred to by some biblical scholars as the prayer of consecration. The Anglican biblical scholar, Reginald Fuller, says, “In a way it represents John’s equivalent of the words of institution, in which Jesus Christ consecrates himself as the messianic sacrifice and offers the benefit of his sacrifice for the disciples to partake of in advance”

Here then is Jesus consecrating himself in the service of God and offering us the benefits, in his sacramental presence in the Holy Eucharist. But this moment of consecration is also a moment of glory for Jesus as demonstrated in several of the verses in the chapter. I am suggesting that it is important that we are reminded of these realities on this feast of the Ascension, because so much of the gospel which is preached is truncated or reductionistic, and by which the Cross is proclaimed without reference to the Ascension or other aspects of salvation history. If you look at the Apostles’ Creed and take note the section dealing with the person of Jesus Christ, you will see there expressed the fullness of the gospel as preached by the Church; and so it speaks of:

1. Incarnation – God’s affirmation of human life and the world in the birth of Jesus;
2. Suffering and the Cross – Redemption;
3. The Resurrection – God’s resounding declaration of the victory of Jesus over sin, evil and death;
4. The Ascension – Glorification of the ascended Lord with the Father as he shares in the divine reign;

5. Pentecost – The gift of the promised Holy Spirit, the Comforter and the empowering and enabling gifts which it imparts.

The same understanding of the fullness of the gospel is present in the Eucharistic prayers. For example, in the Eucharistic Prayer which we are using today, immediately following the acclamation (Christ has died...) the liturgy continues:

And so Heavenly Father, rejoicing in His Holy Incarnation; His Blessed Passion and His Perfect Sacrifice made once for all upon the Cross; His Mighty Resurrection from the dead; His Glorious Ascension into heaven; and looking for His Coming in glory; we offer to you this Bread and this Cup.

So as we celebrate this feast of the Ascension, let us be aware that it is not just enough to talk about Jesus dying for our sins on the cross. Yes, that is true, but that is only a part of the story of God's salvation.

There is, therefore, an imperative to preach the gospel in its fullness within the Church in the face of reductionistic and distorting influences, thereby bringing to the fore the notion that ministry must begin within the household of God where the Gospel is proclaimed in its fullness.

As I embark on the task of leadership of this Diocese, I am fully aware that there is a primacy attached to my responsibility for the life of the church, in leading in serving and caring for you, the people of God, but also in interpreting the gospel to you through preaching and teaching, so that together we can share in the Mission of God for his Church and for the world. I am also aware that this is not a solo task, and so all of us together as clergy, churchworkers and lay leaders, must work at the improvement of the quality of our preaching, the exercise of our teaching ministry, and pursue personal development of our competencies in these areas of ministry.

At the same time we must learn how to preach the gospel with power and effectiveness to a world that is desperately in need of the good news, even as it is being bombarded by secularism which, while seeking to undermine religious faith, has nothing to offer in filling the void it is creating in the life of persons seeking to find a sense of meaning and purpose, a feature of human life which St. Augustine reminds us can only be found when we rest in God.

But the consecration of which this passage speaks is not just of Jesus, because He invites His disciples to a process of consecration also. Jesus prays for their consecration - “They are in the world – keep them in thy name”. They are not of the world – but called out of the world. Keep them in thy Name – (Power). Sustain them in the world. Keep them undefiled from the sin of the world. Here we are faced with the paradox of a people called out and yet in the world. This calls for an act of consecration of the self to God and to God’s service if this is to be realized.

One of the greatest challenges facing us as Christians is the extent to which we are a consecrated people, a people who have consecrated ourselves, separated ourselves/stood out from the rest of society in order to be in the service of God. We live in a society which is permeated at every level by corruption, and in which we benefit cooperatively from ill-gotten gain, and not just the acts of corruption, supposedly restricted to politicians and those in the public service. For example, the inflows into this country from the lotto scam has wide circulation within the economy, and there is not only a culture of silence around it among some persons, but there are many who would suggest that there is nothing wrong with it. When parents can accept the gift of a home from a 15 year old who is not working, and be contented with it, and when teachers in our schools can tell us of the high school students who own their own substantial three-bedroom house, and multiple taxis plying routes, you know that things have gone terribly wrong in this country, where our values and morality are concerned.

But who do you think are the corrupt people? I venture to suggest that we, members of the Church are caught up in the corruption or are benefiting from it. Some of you may recall an incident some time ago in which the couriers inadvertently left a million dollars in the ABM booth in one location, and a lady who came along and found it, lodged a report to the authorities, who came to retrieve it. Subsequently, in a discussion programme on radio concerning this development, people were asked what would they do in that circumstance. One man declared that had it been his wife who found that money and returned it, he would beat the life out of her. A female caller said that she is a Christian, and if she found the money, she would keep half for herself, and give the other half to her pastor!

I warn the Church, that the Rally Card and some of the fundraising activities need to be subjected to closer scrutiny, as they run the risk of bringing drug and other tainted money into the coffers of the Church. Likewise, while the

Church seeks to minister to the spiritual needs of all people, we must be careful how we bend over backward to charge fees and to accommodate some funerals that are outrageous bashment affairs funded by money of dubious origin. Christians are being tainted by direct or tangential connections to these activities. The call to holiness and obedience, as manifestations of a life of consecration, seems to have just gone through the window. We who have been a part of this Church and are the inheritors of a legacy of Christian witness, must ask ourselves, what are we doing with it in our own time? Can it be seen and felt in our homes, our community, our schools, in the workplace, and in the life of the nation?

The Church is called to be a people called out and consecrated as Christ consecrated himself to the Father. As your Bishop, I consecrate myself to a life of holiness and obedience and I seek your prayers, as together we journey on this path of holiness. This will only become a reality when the model for our understanding of our consecration comes from the life and witness of Jesus Christ.

2. But the challenge to be a consecrated people is not just to parade up and down as persons who are holier than thou, but to be a people committed to love and unity within the body and in our witness to the world.

The unity of which Jesus speaks in the text is not just the effect of some nice slogan, rather, it is grounded in God, and is manifested by those in relationship with God. So, in verse 11 Jesus prays, “..that they may be one as you and I are one”. The unity between the Father and the Son constitutes the basis of the unity for which we must strive. In 1 John 4: 11-16 we have set out for us a further understanding of the basis of this Unity. There the basis of unity is love, a love which is grounded in the love of God:

If God so loved us then we should love one another.

Unity comes from a relationship with God which flows into our relationship with others. The Christian, therefore, or the Christian community which cannot love or which has difficulty loving, needs to re-examine its professed relationship with God. As the same chapter of 1 John says:

If someone says he loves God, but hates his brother he is a liar.

As a consecrated people then, we must manifest love in our personal life and in our corporate life within our congregations.

One of the popular distortions of the Christian life in today's world is that we have made it out to be some kind of individualistic affair in which one is somehow locked into a personal relationship with **his or her** Jesus, defined perhaps as the Jesus of the pages of Scripture, while being totally oblivious to what is going on in the world. It is clear in the text that Jesus, in talking about love, is talking about a quality of shared life within the community of faith – a community of love.

There is no question that one of the challenges confronting us as a Diocese is how do we maintain and live out the sense of unity in working together to fulfill the mission and ministry which our Lord has committed to us. As members, we are tempted constantly to see the rest of the Diocese as something outside of ourselves, and which is constantly making demands of us, and that we would be much better off if we could just shake off the shackles of those others who keep impinging upon us and our wellbeing. In an interesting way, in Anglican understanding, the basic unit constituting the church is not the local congregation, but the Diocese. We are one unit under one bishop, all other responsibilities and authority being of a derived and shared nature.

And yet, we must affirm at the same time that unity does not mean uniformity or enforced conformity. There must be room for the expression of uniqueness and individuality in the life of congregations. As Jackson W. Carroll reminds us, there must be “local ecclesiologies” as expressions of initiative and innovations. He explains this further by saying that these “local ecclesiologies” are “organizational forms and practices through which local congregations attempt to give expression to the gospel and received ecclesial traditions in ways that are appropriate to their local, social and cultural contexts”. The Church, through its administrative and policy making bodies must make it clear that it appreciates the peculiar expressions of these “local ecclesiologies”.

Anthropologists constantly remind us of the place of community in the African understanding of the nurture and wellbeing of each person, suggesting at times that we have lost something of this African cultural identity in our Jamaican context. And yet, I want to suggest that, in affirming this principle, that it has always been a part of our Christian identity, present here in the words of our Lord, and articulated repeatedly in the Epistles of St. Paul. The acknowledgement of gifts of the Spirit, the call

to various offices, and the underscoring of unity as marks of the Church are manifest in the literature of the New Testament for those with eyes to see.

As we go through this time of transition as a Church, and are confronted with changes within the Church and within the life of the nation, we are likely to feel vulnerable at times, and are prone to retreat to our safe places, usually at the expense of community. This, however, is not consistent with the commands of Jesus. John, writing in 1 John 4 makes it quite clear than any profession of faith in God and Christian discipleship must involve love of one another, and of course, locates the imperative to love, not in the fact that people are nice to us and lovable, but in the very character of God and His Son Jesus Christ:

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “ I love God”, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

As the community of the redeemed, we must become a community where people can find love, acceptance, forgiveness, and support, as they face life’s vicissitudes, and seek to discover where the God of love may be connected to their life and experience. Mainline religious traditions, like our own, are scampering to find ways to grow and to prove relevance to the life of people in today’s world. The easy solution which has been proposed and pursued by some is to try to be carbon copies of newer churches, have what are supposed to be more lively services with more hand clapping, throw away liturgies, and let spontaneity reign. This is perceived to be the way to have a “needs-driven” church – “give the people what they want”. Many of our people are hurting at very personal levels as they try to cope with life and try to find and be found of God in the midst of their struggles. They are having financial difficulties, living in fear because of the pervasiveness of crime and violence, they are dealing with brokenness in their family life, and hopelessness, despair and cynicism as they look to those in governance to make a difference to their lives. We must seek to discern and to find creative ways to respond to the hurts of our people, not just with the application of band-aid and superficial responses, but in ways that assist them in encountering God in worship and in dealing with the challenges of daily living.

There are also contemporary challenges to which the church must respond if it is to demonstrate to its members and the world that it is indeed the community it claims to be. For example, given the increasing sensitizing of the society to child abuse and violence directed against children in our society, the church must step forward and become a serious advocate for the cause of our children, but must also use its existing network of congregations to educate and actively sponsor programs which are geared towards prevention and rehabilitation of victims of abuse and violence.

Additionally, we are becoming increasingly aware of the tremendous financial difficulties which young people are facing in attempting to access tertiary education. Let me suggest first of all, that we need to develop within our congregations greater sensitivity to the needs of the children and young people who are currently within our fellowship as a start. Too many congregations have young persons who are at significant points of transition in their development and in their educational pursuits, and no one bothers to ask how they are doing, what they are seeking to accomplish in life, and how the individual members of the church may be of assistance to them. I believe we are not short of resource persons in many congregations who could assist young persons in their academic pursuits, but too many of us are wearing blinders when it comes to seeing and responding to the needs of these persons.

At another level I want to challenge members of the church and of the society as a whole to re-think the excesses and vulgarity which are attending many weddings and funerals, even as those making such expenditures and displays claim to have nothing to assist needy children and young people in our congregations and society. There are certain ethnic and religious traditions in which nothing goes into the ground with the dead which cannot be of use to the next generation. We would do well to take a leaf out of their book so that we can invest in the creation of a community of love and in the creation of a Jamaica in which our young minds are provided with the opportunities for the development of their God-given abilities and gifts.

3. This moment of consecration which we see in the text is also a moment of challenge to the disciples to exercise the mission to which they were called.

One of the mistakes we make as Christians is to believe that the Church is called into being for itself. In the light of the emphasis on unity and love,

we even believe that the Church is truly the Church when it is at unity and demonstrates love for each other. Unfortunately, this is definitely not the case. **Love and unity constitute our witness to the world, as to whose we are, and to the mission to which we are called. So love and unity without mission are futile.**

The text portrays Jesus' consecration of himself in the context of his impending death, resurrection and ascension, with the underlying assumption that with our Lord's departure, the consecration and engagement in mission by the disciples are inaugurated. It is with the Ascension that the mission of the Church is inaugurated, and concretized in Pentecost, and its observance must be an opportunity for us to re-examine the mission of the Church in this Diocese. So our celebration of this enthronement on this Ascension Day and in anticipation of the feast of Pentecost must hold some significance for us.

In a March 2012 article in the Anglican publication, *Living Church*, Kevin Goodrich addresses himself to the matter of the church's exercise of mission and evangelism, and makes some observations which are most relevant to us as we gather today. He labels the current approach of many Anglicans to the mission imperative as the "**franchise**" system, by which he likens congregations to the franchise with which chains of businesses operate. Of this he opines:

The old "franchise" system in which most of the faithful were loyal to a particular brand of Christianity has almost faded away. Few congregations can get away with sustaining themselves by their denominational identity alone. The old system of baptizing, confirming, marrying, and then beginning this process again cannot be guaranteed and will require congregations to reach out to people who have not attended Anglican churches or may have never attended church at all".

Given the operation of this overarching system, we have tended to operate with one of two models in approaching church growth: **the attractional model** or the **incarnational model**. The attractional model at base says, "If you want to have a relationship with Jesus Christ come to us". As a non-evangelistic perspective it is less about a relationship with Jesus Christ and more about finding a church home where "you'll be comfortable and cared for". By way of contrast, the missional model, which we Anglicans often label "incarnational", involves leaving the safety and security of our church

programs and worship services to meet, encounter and engage the unchurched on their own turf.

Involvement in 'mission' implies engagement with persons where they are, and at the points of their most urgent needs. This means affirmation of the world as it is, in respect of politics, economics, culture and religion, and not merely the judging of it or cowardly escaping from it.

Having pointed out the truth which someone from overseas has to share with us as Church, let me point out that one of our own Caribbean theologians has been saying the same for decades, but we tend to be deaf to our own Caribbean voices. Listen to Ashley Smith:

...the partners in Christ's mission should be continually aware of the need to work with God and the agencies of the community, in freeing persons and whole communities from whatever is repressive and productive of the dependency, fatalism and egotistic competitiveness, that are such significant features of Caribbean reality in general and the life of the church in particular. All who are prepared for the practice of Christian ministry must be continually aware of the various powers that undermine the growth of persons into Christlikeness or authentic humanness in relation to the concept of the Image of God.

This means that the mission focus calls us to look outside of ourselves and to see how we relate to and serve the wider community, the people of God, to whom we are called to witness and to serve. The question is, what are we doing in our own time and context that reflects our abilities and gifts, rather than simply living off the legacy of the past? This is a particularly relevant question for us as a Diocese as the nation celebrates the 50th year of its Independence. We must ask questions about the state of the membership and the future direction of the ministry of this Diocese. And clearly, the way we seek to exercise mission and ministry in Jamaica today cannot be the same as it was 50 years ago, as Jamaica today is a far cry from what it was then.

As I indicated in my Synod Charge, if as a Diocese we would seek to respond in ways that are relevant to the context in which we find ourselves today, then we must be prepared to engage in a process of renewal. By renewal I am speaking of a comprehensive process of reclamation, rehabilitation, and restoration of a sense of Mission and Ministry to a position of centrality, and in order that it may become the energizing force in our life as a community of faith. And what this requires is **a re-awakening**

of our call to mission and ministry which resides in our baptismal covenant, and which finds expression in our Catechism where it speaks to the duty of all Christians.

There it speaks first of all to **personal commitment and piety** (what the text calls **Consecration**); **the imperative to participate in evangelism**; and **participation of each Christian in the mission and ministry entrusted to the Church**. In practical terms it means that we must be engaged in the struggles of the life of our people and make those positive responses and contributions which reside within our capabilities. As we focus on the achievements of these past 50 years of Independence, we must understand that the struggle continues for many of our people, as the liberation, justice, and equality which are embedded in the aspirations of an independent people have not been achieved for many. There is still not equality for all before the law and in access to opportunities and the collective resources of this country. We must therefore not fool ourselves into thinking that Independence is a destination at which we have arrived. Accordingly, we must be concerned about the pervasive abuse of our children, human trafficking, poverty, unemployment, crime and violence, social injustices, the protracted delays in the delivery of justice through the courts, the plight of the disadvantaged and marginalized, corruption, the neglect of the environment, the challenges within the educational system of the nation, to name a few.

As your bishop, I shall seek to keep these issues in the forefront of my ministry, and shall do so without entanglement in partisan politics, but with a deep sense of awareness of the reality that these are political issues, and at times will create discomfort for some of the faithful.

4. And finally, this moment of consecration also involved the promise of the divine presence and power with the disciples in the exercise of their mission.

In the context from which the text comes, and in the various accounts of the Ascension, whether in the Acts of the Apostles or in the Gospels, there is present some form of promise that the disciples will have power to perform certain signs or to proclaim the gospel and, in the fulfillment of this mission, they would be accompanied by the divine presence. In Luke 24: 49, part of the gospel which was read earlier, the risen Jesus promised the disciples that with his ascension “they will be clothed with power from on high”. In that great ascension hymn which we will joyfully sing in this service, “Alleluia,

sing to Jesus...” we have these comforting words, “Alleluia, not as orphans are we left in sorrow now...”, indicating that we are affirming our confidence in this promised power from on high.

This is subject to a lot of misunderstanding as persons are prone to look at the reference to the word ‘power’ in terms of its popular usage. Power here refers, not to the oppressive use of force as we see it in evidence all over the world today, but to something which is transformative and liberating of the life of the individual and of the community. The truth is that the exercise of mission is an awesome responsibility requiring empowerment from God. Like the disciples who found their source of power, peace and enabling when they had come to the end of their pride and confidence in their own abilities, so we must come to acknowledge that the mission which lies before you and me, will not depend on how spiritual we think we are, or how sincere we are, but on our sense of dependence on God’s calling and enabling for mission. The greeting of the risen Jesus to His disciples with the words, “Peace be with you” and “Receive Holy Spirit”, are words of assurance to a timid group of disciples, a group which could have been crippled and immobilized by their own sense of their earlier failure. What had not happened until then could now become possible with the gift from on high.

Implicit in this empowering gift is a statement of the nature of the divine presence that would be manifested among them, namely, the Holy Spirit. In the history of the Church, the exercise of power has meant at times the exercise of power which is oppressive, especially so when we have been acting in collusion with the state, and so there are chapters in our history for which we must apologize as Church. We must also be careful that, in the popular definition of the Church as “the moral conscience of the nation” we understand this as something to be exercised in humility and not in arrogance and bigotry. To be the conscience of the nation is not just to make pronouncements but to be present among the poor and marginalized, the hopeless and despairing, the powerless and the abused, standing with them, working alongside them in transformative ways, and being a voice for the voiceless by way of advocacy, and in challenging the society and those in governance to act justly toward those who are neglected in the distribution of scarce benefit and the struggle for power. But in all this expression of what can be seen as activism, we cannot forget that there is a gospel to share, which is the very reason for our involvement in the first place.

As your bishop I shall not shy away from such engagement, nevertheless, I am not the Church, we are the Church, and we must stand together in this commitment to be partners in this mission which our risen and ascended Lord has entrusted to us.

So when, therefore, we meet in this fashion today, we give thanks to God for His saving work accomplished in Jesus Christ, who is now seated at the right hand of the Father, where he now intercedes for his Church; for the guidance of his Church through the ages in raising up pastoral leaders for the people of God; for the celebration of his many blessings to us as a Diocese and the peculiar ministry and mission to which we are called as a part of the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, I commit myself to strive, with the guidance and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, to be a faithful pastor to the people of this Diocese and to the people of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, and invite your prayerful support and participation as we continue on a journey of faithful witness to Jamaica, and to the people of the Cayman Islands.

AMEN.