

Peter Toon Memorial Sermon preached at Pusey House, Oxford, on May 22nd 2019 by Fr Tony Noble, Rector Emeritus of All Saints, San Diego, California (TEC).

*Fr Tony Noble is an Australian, ordained in 1980 to the priesthood in the Diocese of Adelaide. From 1985-2003 he was Vicar of St Mark's, Fitzroy, Diocese of Melbourne. From 2003-2011 he was Rector of All Saints, San Diego, California (ECUSA) where he met Dr Toon & ministered to him.*

I first met Peter Toon about 12 years ago, when I was Rector of All Saints, San Diego. I knew of him as an evangelical scholar, writer & defender of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

It was a Saturday night & my phone rang. The voice said, "Is that Fr Noble?". I replied, Yes. "I understand that you use Rite 1 with catholic additions.....how close to the Prayer Book are your Services?", he asked. I said that the 8 am Mass was mostly from the Prayer Book.

Next morning Peter & his wife, Vita, attended the 8 am Mass. he introduced himself & I felt quite honoured that such a notable evangelical had attended my church. They continued to attend faithfully every Sunday. Thus began a pastoral relationship which became a friendship.

Peter described himself as an evangelical catholic & his great theme was that the Anglican church was "reformed catholic". He believed that the 1662 BCP was the foundation document for this understanding. I enjoyed our theological discussions & listening to him.

Peter came to San Diego for health reasons & to be near his family. In due course his health declined. I visited him with Holy Communion in hospital & at home. Then came the day. It remember it well - it was a Saturday & St Mark's day. I had just finished saying our usual Saturday Mass & the phone rang. It was Vita, saying the time was near for Peter to go to his Lord.

I got the Blessed Sacrament & Holy Oil & drive to their home. Upon arrival Peter asked for the Last Rites "in your tradition". I was humbled to be asked by this great evangelical scholar to administer the last rites. It was a grace-filled experience for me.

I spent the rest of the morning with Peter, listening to his favourite hymns on an old cassette player, occasionally praying or reading the bible. In the afternoon I went home to prepare for Sunday. About 8 pm the phone rang - Vita telling me that Peter had passed. I went over & Vita had lovingly dressed Peter in his robes. His instructions were that I should commend him using the 1662 Burial Office, which was typed out in Peter's non-nonsense way.

It was a privilege to have ministered to Peter & his family.

There is no rite for Holy Unction in the 1662 BCP. However an examination of the BCP reveals something akin to the Last Rites. I refer to the Visitation of the Sick & the Communion of the Sick, which follows immediately afterwards.

We need to remember that in the 16th & 17th centuries death was common. To summon the priest was probably seen as a sign that death was imminent. Even in my youth I

remember the priest taking holy communion to a parishioner & her neighbours assumed she was near death.

Cranmer's order for the Visitation of the Sick is a fascinating rite. It uses traditional prayers from the customary of the time. There is, of course, references to God's visitation & chastisement, as well as the necessity for repentance. After this comes an affirmation of the Faith in the form of the apostles creed.

Then follows confession. Not just the General Confession, but what Cranmer called "a special confession". This uses the traditional form of absolution that is used in the sacrament of reconciliation. The rite concludes with the familiar blessing, "The Lord bless you & keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you....."

The Communion of the Sick follows. It assumes that the Eucharist will be celebrated at the bedside, albeit some-what shortened. It begins with the Collect, Epistle & Gospel & then to the confession, with the same instruction as to a special confession.

At the heart of this Communion Service is one of Cranmer's magnificent prayers - the Prayer of Humble Access. We know it as a preparation for receiving Holy Communion. But the 1662 BCP has it before the Prayer of Consecration, as a seal on the Preface & Sanctus.

The prayer is a remarkable combination of catholic & reformed teaching. It is an image of Peter Toon's understanding that as Anglicans we are reformed catholic christians in a church which he described as "reformed catholic in substance & historical expression".

We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold & great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, and to drink his Blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his Body, & our souls washed through his most precious Blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.  
Amen.

We do not presume. The prayer begins with our unworthiness & the mercy of God. Our unworthiness is a consistent theme of Cranmer & the reformers. Then we pray that we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs. This is a marvellous reference to Matthew 15:21-28, the story of the Canaanite who begged Jesus to heal her daughter. The disciples wanted Jesus to send her away. He responds to her with an image of the children's bread being thrown to the dogs.

The woman's reply is beautiful: "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs from the Master's table". So we say that we are not worthy to gather up the crumbs from the Master's Table. The Master's Table! The Eucharistic image is profound & obvious.

Then comes a change of direction....."But thou art the same Lord".  
What a pivotal word, BUT, is. We are not worthy BUT it doesn't matter.

No doubt Cranmer had in mind all those times that St Paul uses BUT to emphasise a truth, change direction or point to God's unending love despite our sinful nature.

In Ephesians 2 Paul contrasts the old ways of sin with new life in Christ.

v 4 “But God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us”  
v 13-14 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ”

In Galatians 4 Paul gives images of slave vs free & adoption vs sonship.

v 4 “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son”  
v 26 “But the Jerusalem above is free, & she is our mother”

In Galatians 6:14 we have Paul’s great saying:  
“But far be it for me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

In 1 Corinthians there are many well-known verses where Paul uses the word, BUT:  
1:22-24 “But we preach Christ crucified”  
1:26-27 “But God chose what is foolish”  
15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am”  
15:20 “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead”

I could go on.

So Cranmer uses the word, BUT, to turn our unworthiness on its head.  
“But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy”

Now a surprising turn:  
“Grant us so to eat the Flesh.....& to drink his Blood”  
This is carnal language & reminds us of when Jesus said to his disciples: “ Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man & drink his blood, you have no life in you”. The gospel records them saying, “This is intolerable language”.

Despite everything pointing to Cranmer’s denial of transubstantiation & the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, here we have an irrefutable declaration that what we receive is the very Body & Blood of Christ.

And for a specific purpose. That our bodies may be made clean & our souls washed.

Then comes the wonderful climax:  
“That we may evermore dwell in him, & he in us”

Imagine hearing those words as you are about to receive Holy Communion on your death-bed! As the conclusion to the Prayer they are the ultimate in both catholic & reformed Eucharistic theology.

The poetry of the Prayer of Humble Access & its theology are mirrored in a well-known hymn by the 19th century non-conformist writer & social justice warrior, Josiah Condor. It is an appropriate conclusion.

Bread of Heaven, on thee we feed,  
For thy Flesh is meat indeed;  
Ever may our souls be fed  
With this true & living bread,

Day by day with strength supplied  
Through the life of him who died.

Vine of heaven, thy blood supplies  
This blest cup of sacrifice;  
'Tis thy wounds our healing give;  
To thy cross we look & live:  
Thou, our life! O let us be  
Rooted, grafted, built on thee.  
Amen.