

VI Pentecost (10b)  
Mk 6.14-29  
12 July 2009  
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*A sermon to commemorate the 176<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of “National Apostasy”  
12 July 2009 Church of the Holy Communion*

“Jesus called to him the twelve, and began to send them out...and gave them authority....”

*In ✠ Nomine Patris.*

I MADE a dreadful discovery living in Wisconsin a decade ago during seminary, a discovery so horrific that when you hear about it, you are going to be shocked to your foundations and sent reeling from this room. I discovered—now brace yourself, Effie—I discovered that people from off don’t really care about my South Carolina genealogy! [You see, just like I told you! you wouldn’t believe it!] In Milwaukee nobody asks the Charleston question “Now honey, who are your people?” They are far more likely to ask the Savannah question “Sweetpea, what are you drinking?” That’s right: when I announced that I am descended from blah-blah-blah who married whats-her-name at Goose Creek Church in 1718, those people stared at me like I had just announced my shoe size as a pertinent fact, like they didn’t know *who we are* down here, what *any* of our Cooper River plantations were, or *all* that we have accomplished by marrying only inside the family. Well, even if they’re in ignorance how important the Bonneaus and Boinneaus and DuBoses are, at least *we* know who we are, and whose we are, how to make chicken “pirleau” and pimiento cheese, and to say “Yes, ma’am” even to a twelve-year-old!

Y’all know of course that Anthony Toomer Porter was “from heah” just up at Georgetown, and that he is surely our cousin (somehow). Doctor Porter established this church if he didn’t exactly found it, and he put this parish on the Charleston map in a very definite way, much unlike any other of the city or country parishes. Why and how? Because he was keenly aware of *who we are* and *whose we are* as Christians and as Churchmen, our “religious genealogy” if you will. He knew the Church to be the living Body of Christ in direct descent from the Apostles, and all of us under one Lord Jesus Christ, who called to him the twelve and sent them out and gave to them authority.

Now let’s think about that *authority* just for a moment as Doctor Porter did. To be given Jesus’ authority means to have the right to act in his Name, to represent him, in fact to *be him* in any situation. That’s what we mean when we say the Church is his Body: the Church is the living embodiment of Christ now today in 2009, and it has been for 2000 years since the Ascension. But the Church has sometimes forgotten her divine lineage and acted like something ordinary—like maybe the Yacht Club or the Junior League. (I could have said the Huguenot Society, but they never forget *their* divine lineage!) Somewhere along, after the reign of William and Mary, the Church of England both at home and here in the colonies seemed to forget who we are and whose we are; we forgot that we are *The Church* in and of England, that we are “reformed Catholics,” and we started acting like some merely generic “denomination,” like the Assembly of the First-Born Frozen Chosen, the local franchise of some club where nice people get nicer, less concerned about proclaiming the whole Gospel than about our social standing in the community: genealogy over grace, we might say.

It was into that world and that mindset in 1833 that John Keble preached his sermon on England’s *national apostasy*, her forgetting of her divine lineage and mission. Listen to his words from that July Sunday: “The point really to be considered is whether the fashionable liberality of this generation is not ascribable to the same temper which led the Jews voluntarily to set about degrading themselves to the level of the idolatrous Gentiles? And if it be true that such enactments are forced upon the Legislature by public

opinion, is APOSTASY too hard a word to describe the temper of that nation?" [By the way, that sermon lasted well onto an hour and a half, so if this one begins to verge on twelve or thirteen minutes, y'all jus' hol' ya horses, heah?]

Now it is possible that you and I may not react to this word "apostasy" with the appropriate emotion. We might not be shocked to our foundations and sent reeling from the room. Apostasy is not a pretty word, it's not a pretty thing. Apostasy is a turning of your back upon your loved one. It describes a condition—now brace yourself, Effie—analogue to paying a whore while your wife is starving. That's the Biblical image of apostasy Keble intended by "the Jew's degrading themselves to the level of the idolatrous Gentiles." Apostates, be they unaware as in 1833 or active and eager as in Anaheim in 2009, these are the Anti-Christ, "those who deny the Father and the Son." (I John 2:22) Well, those university members, clerical and lay, at Saint Mary's, Oxford, who heard Keble's sermon that Sunday July 14<sup>th</sup>, *they* were shocked to their foundations and sent reeling from the room, and they set out from that Monday morning to change the English Church's mind, to wake her up and remind her who she was and whose she was—and the Oxford Movement was begun.

The Church of England was to be recognized and honored again as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the one and only Church who is the very Bride of Christ and his Body, his representative, and in fact Christ himself; the Bishops recognized as the Successors of the twelve Apostles Christ sent out; and the Church's teachings as bearing the authority of Jesus. Being "high church" means nothing about vestments and incense; being "high church" means "I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;" it means taking the Creed *literally*, not *liberally*. And so the *Tracts for the Times* from 1833 to 1841 taught the historic Christian doctrine on everything from the Daily Office to the gates of heaven and hell, and the names of Oxford theologians became household words: the laity discussed John Henry Newman's, John Keble's, and Edward Pusey's *ideas* like you and I discuss Mark Sanford singing "Don't cry for me, Argentina." [Can anyone here this morning even *name* a theologian of today? If you can, then pat yourself on the back! Since Brett Favre retired, I can't name even a single baseball player!]

Anglican priests dedicated themselves to working amongst the poorest, humblest folk in England and built parishes in the slums and ghettos of London, Brighton, Manchester, and Sheffield for England's humblest, poorest folk, where they preached the Catholic Faith *and* the need for antiseptic to combat the cholera. With the newly revived convents of Anglican nuns, they built schools, and clinics, and clothed children, and on Sundays the High Mass was sung in parish churches where the altars, vestments, and music were the only beautiful things these congregations had ever seen or heard. In short, the Apostolic Church of England was reborn again from the apostate ashes of her former self like Dumbledore's pet phoenix one more time

Their American cousins the Episcopalians were being reawakened along the very same lines: Doctor Porter in Charleston, who built churches, schools, and clinics, Father Muhlenberg in New York City whom he emulated, to name but a pair of the American Catholic revivalists and ministers to the poor. And even in those places, (say, Saint Philip's), where the ceremonial did not keep pace with, say, Church of the Holy Communion, suddenly *everybody* was awakening again to *who we are* and *whose we are*: the *Church*—One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic; the Church whose one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord, who called to himself the Twelve, and sent them out to do his will, and gave them authority—to preach the Gospel Truth in his Name, to heal the sick and cast out demons; to offer salvation for all through the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Altar; and to proclaim one Body and one Spirit, one Hope in God's call to us, one God and Father of all, one Church, one Faith, one Lord.