

**Sermon given by the Right Reverend Duleep de Chickera, the Bishop of Colombo (Sri Lanka) at the Eucharist attended by Anglican Bishops assembled for the Lambeth Conference, their Spouses and Ecumenical Participants**

Sunday, 20th July 2008

We gather in this impressive, awesome, magnificent cathedral this morning as representatives of several nations, several cultures, several tongues. And certainly as representatives of several Christian denominations, and other living faiths.

This is a joyful and a sacred moment, and I would like to suggest that we keep a pause in our worship to express our gratitude and our thanks to God for all those responsible for shaping our Anglican identity, for nourishing our spirituality, and for helping in the formation of our common life through the centuries and in so many parts of the world.

The text that I have for our reflection on this occasion is the ninth verse of the twelfth chapter of St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians - a familiar text for all of us: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Paul is here both confessing and proclaiming the paradox of grace in the Christian Gospel. It is, as we increasingly recognise and acknowledge our vulnerability in our journey of discipleship in Christ and with Christ, that we receive grace to be, and to become, faithful disciples. And I want you to hold on to this text because it is the idea that will undergird our thinking through the rest of this reflection. The recognition of our vulnerability is what makes growth possible in Christian discipleship.

There are two realities that encompass us as we meet as a world family of the Anglican Communion. And I would like to draw your attention to both these realities, without which our conference and our forward journey will become meaningless.

The first is that our world is a torn and divided world. Bishops are expected to bring their dioceses with them to the Lambeth Conference, and Bishops whose dioceses strive to be faithful by the challenges that come to us from God's world will inevitably bring along with their diocese the pain and the struggles, the injustice, the evil, the hostility that men and women encounter in today's world. It is indeed a true saying that God gives the Church an agenda out of the crises of the world. And so my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the Anglican Communion must always give the highest priority to our invitation from Christ to participate with Christ in transforming God's world. To bring healing, peace, justice, reconciliation, abundant life, where there is oppression, where there is hostility, where there is strife, and division. This concept of the world in pain must, through this conference and after the

conference, receive the energy and spirituality of our Church. No other priority can contend for that place. God has called us and placed us in God's world so that we might participate with him in bringing this transformation.

The second reality is the reality that we are a wounded community. Some of us are not here, and that is an indication that all is not well. Certainly the crisis is complex. It is not a crisis that can be resolved instantly.

The journey ahead is a long arduous one - a journey that will demand our prayers, our faithfulness, our mutual trust in each other, and of course our trust in God who makes reconciliation possible.

I would like to draw your attention to the parable that was read as the Gospel: the words of the master were wise words. Let them grow together.

There can and there must be no uprooting, simply because if we attempt this game of uprooting the unrighteous then, my dear sisters and brothers, none of us will remain. We are all a mix of the wheat and the weeds. The wisdom of these words suggest that we stay together because we draw from a common soil, a common tradition, a common heritage. We are what we are regardless of our differences, because of our common life together and our origins. Transformation comes in this interaction, and transformation must come from within.

In Jeffna, the northernmost part of the Diocese of Colombo, a church is being converted into a centre for conflict analysis and peace - Christ Church, Jeffna. The church has been renovated after several bouts of bombing and shelling. Something is emerging: a mandate and an agenda for peace and reconciliation in this place, but we have decided that we will retain the marks and the scars of war on the walls of this church. Transformation comes from within. The old gradually converts as men and women pray and talk and dialogue, and even disagree as we must, but call to mind repeatedly that disciples of Jesus stay together and journey together.

There are three challenges that I like to leave for us as we address the objectives of this Lambeth Conference: - to strengthen our Anglican identity, and to enable bishops to be leaders in God's mission. Here are three thoughts that could contribute both to identity and mission.

The first is: our communion must return to the discipline and the practice of self-scrutiny. We have a rich tradition that supports this discipline - the retreat, the quiet time, contemplation, meditation, spiritual counsellors, all of which enhance this practice and discipline of men and women coming to God in stillness to evaluate and examine their lives: - the parable of the plank and the speck of dust. Christ calls us to be hard on ourselves and Christ calls us to consider him only as our measure and our standard. So we stand and evaluate our lives in relation to the fullness and the abundance of life in Jesus. And then when lapses and shortcomings are detected we work with

the Spirit to overcome, to grow, to become beautiful and faithful in the eyes of Christ. Mind you, the standard is always Christ.

It's not that bishop who is giving you trouble. It's not that archdeacon whose theology always irritates you (and there are a few around like that).

Self-scrutiny is possible in the Christian journey as we stand naked before Jesus the Christ.

The second challenge that I'd like to leave with you, is one that we need to resuscitate and declare again and again, and that is the challenge of unity in diversity. As I look around and see you, I see this wonderful unity in diversity. Shortly, when the sacrament is administered, lips from numerous countries, numerous nationalities, numerous cultures will touch the same cup. We are united in spite of the fact that we are different, because in Christ we are equal. There's enough to go around if none will be greedy.

Here my dear sisters and brothers is an insight of what the Church is called to be: an inclusive communion, where there is space equally for everyone and anyone, regardless of colour, gender, ability, sexual orientation. Unity in diversity is a cherished Anglican tradition - a spirituality if you like, which we must reinforce in all humility for the sake of Christ and Christ's Gospel.

The third challenge that I have for you is that of the prophetic voice. Very often people say: "all this talk of reconciliation is not complete unless we address and deal with the injustice of the world." And so the Anglican Communion must articulate this prophetic voice regardless of where we serve in the world. Now as many of you will be aware, the prophetic voice has two strands, and it is imperative that these strands are held together. The first is the prophetic voice is a voice for the voiceless. There are those who for political reasons, cultural reasons, economic reasons, military reasons, cannot speak for themselves, or if they do, they do so at tremendous risk. And so the Anglican Communion must speak on their behalf - whether it is the crisis in Sri Lanka, whether it is the crisis in Zimbabwe, or Sudan, or Afghanistan or Iraq. The voiceless must be given a voice through the leadership of the Anglican Communion. The second strand that goes with a voice for the voiceless, is the calling into accountability of those who abuse power: authoritarian regimes who oppress and suppress the people. The prophetic voice will ask poignant, relevant questions: "why", and sometimes, "how dare you?"

Two other comments about the prophetic tradition - in a sense the prophetic voice is monotonous. It's the same thing as long as the problem remains. And so, you don't need to worry if you're not saying anything new. Relentless monotony. And the second feature is that there is no self-interest in the prophetic tradition. We speak for justice and order in God's world, and we speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves.

I want to conclude by quoting one of my favourite Archbishops - Archbishop William Temple, who once said: "The Church is the one institution that does not live for itself." My dear sisters and brothers, as we move from this wonderful retreat, through this beautiful eucharist into our conference, let us hold on these word. For here is the crux of Anglican identity, and here is the crux of Anglican spirituality. We do not live for ourselves, and all our energy, all our gifts are directed to abundant life for the other.

Amen.