

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity given to me to deliver this Oration in honour of Jessie Campbell Nicholson.

I do in fact remember her and her love of the church and particularly the Cathedral Church of St. Paul here in Melbourne.

Now I didn't know her well but I was aware of a formidable force in her passion for things ecclesiastic being just so. You are all probably aware that I spent 13 years in the Diocese of Bathurst and that we have come home to the Diocese of Melbourne only two and a half years ago. So in those 13 + years I was not aware of Jessie and her life and indeed her dying. So my memories are scanty, aged and few.

PPs are a fascinating lot.

What are they? In the Roman expression of catholicity a PP is of course the Parish Priest, for some of us the term PP would mean the same thing.

In fact in the Diocese of Bathurst it was decided that in the review of the Parishes and Other Matters Ordinance the term Parish Priest would be used for all Priests in ministry in Parishes in the diocese. I was and still am very much in favour of using names for functions that mean what they say. A Parish Priest is a person who exercises their priestly ministry in a parish setting, be they Vicar, Rector, Assistant, Curate, Associate or whatever. Mind you this only worked in the written Ordinance and made little or no impact on what the local Rector was/is called.

But we are here this evening with a further or other definition of PP.

I don't know if I was on the list or PPs held by Jessie Nicholson. Does anyone know who got on the list? Was there a list? How did one qualify to be on the list of Proper Priests? Well in conversation with David Connolly it would seem that there was indeed a list and that list was not extensive, few qualified!!

Many years ago one of my daughters came home from, school, one day with a question; Dad what is a Real Priest?

At that time she was attending a local Catholic school and someone had asked her what her dad did, on being told that he was a priest the questioner replied but he can't be because he is married and you are his child. He can't be a real priest.

Let me divert for a moment to put a bit more context in place.

Jessie Campbell Nicholson BEM1.2.1925 – 14.4.2009
Oration 2012

I was brought up in a catholic family, I have no recollection of having not known God and God's place in my life or rather my place in God's life. I am one of seven children; six of us have reached middle age and are hale and hearty by and large. One of my brothers died a few days after his birth.

We lived across the road from St. Mary's Church in Colac and we attended mass there every week, dad sang in what they called a choir but being in the 1950s in typical RC fashion music was not a significant part of the Sunday Mass. Mass was in Latin and very mysterious, we mostly said the rosary to pass the time while it all happened up there in the really holy place with the real professional Christians, the good Irish Priests.

Having four sons and two daughters my father, like so many Roman/Irish fathers, hoped and prayed for one of his sons to have a vocation and go into the priesthood as they called it.

When I finished School at age 18 I nearly fulfilled his dream or hope by entering the Order of St. John of God. A monastic and yet engaged Order.

The rest of the story is too long but suffice to say that I left the Order prior to taking Solemn Life committing vows.

I became an Anglican by conviction some 27 years ago and ordained only 25years ago.

When I became an ordinand I told my parents that I had in fact been an Anglican for some time and that I was hoping to be ordained priest. Not a fair way to break this sort of news.

Well all of this is getting to the point that when my father was dying and all of us were gathered around his bed he called me to come closer and he told me that God had answered his prayer, that he did indeed have a son who was a priest, not he said the way he might have wanted or expected but never the less his prayer was answered. He asked me to pray with him and I led my mum and brothers and sisters in the prayer for the dying and then we all received Communion from a local RC hospital visitor.

Now in my father's eyes I was a proper or real priest.

What was in the mind of Jess Nicholson? What made a priest proper? I actually think that there is a sense of humour here; I think that there is a bit of tongue in cheek but also a very serious attitude to priesthood and the expression of that in Anglicanism.

I think she delighted in saying Proper Priest often to see the reaction of the person she was addressing.

Does the wearing of certain clothing in certain colours contribute to the definition of proper?

Or is it the way a Proper Priest does things? The way the Mass and I presume that this term Mass matters, is celebrated and the amount and quality of the haberdashery worn by those involved in this celebration.

I once asked a Jesuit priest if he was celebrating on a particular Sunday, he replied to my question by saying that we were all celebrants. Now there is a discussion to be had. Is the right and thus proper term for the person who is leading the celebration of Eucharist, Celebrant or President or Presider and do we say mass or celebrate Eucharist or do we try to do both?

To be proper is to be upright, honest, sincere, conforming to certain standards. I am not sure that I really want to be known as proper when we get to this level. Proper is a bit of a worry if it takes on the sense of judgement of others who might not be seen as proper or real for that matter.

Yet I want to explore this a bit.

We in the Anglican expression of the church catholic have the great gift of diversity and inclusion. At our best we are hospitable, generous and welcoming.

At our worst we are excluding, judgemental and mean.

As we look at the issue of Proper Priests we could be seen to fit the second or judgemental, excluding and mean model, if we assert that we are in some way Proper and many others are therefore not proper or are less priests.

I recently had the privilege and challenge of leading a retreat for the 20 Deacons who were ordained priest on the 26th November last.

It was difficult to know what to say to this very diverse group of people.

I was struck by the radical difference I was encountering in the people who were making the retreat and who were to be ordained priest.

I was ordained in St. Pauls with a group of 16 other men. All of us were white Anglo Saxon/Celtic.

Now some 14 years later here we have a group as diverse as the diocese they were being ordained to serve. Women and men, from different ethnic backgrounds and

different understanding of what it is they are called to be as priests in the Church of God.

There were some who had come from a very different perspective and theology and who had not been brought up as it were in the tradition of the Church that I have been part of all my life and particularly my life as a priest and more latterly bishop.

What a strange experience to be with a group so diverse, for some silence was most welcome for others challenging and not at all helpful.

The same applied to the way I led the retreat, coming from my background and my way of being was not the way for all of us gathered for this significant time.

Does any of this give us an understanding of what it is to be proper or what Jessie thought was proper.

What is it to be a priest might be a good matter to ponder for a moment?

The Book of Common Prayer

THE PREFACE TO THE ORDINAL

1634

IT is evident unto all men, diligently readinge holye scripture, and auncient aucthours, that from the Apostles tyme, there hathe bene these orders of Ministers in Christes church, Bisshoppes, Priestes, and Deacons, which Offices were evermore had in suche reverent estimacion, that no man by his own private aucthoritie, might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, examined, and knowen, to have such equalities, as were requisite for the same. And also by publique prayer, with imposicion of handes, approved, and admitted thereunto. And therefore to the entent these orders shoulde bee continued, and reverentlye used, and estemed in this Church of England, it is requysite, that no man (not beyng at thys presente Bisshop, Priest, nor Deacon) shall execute anye of them, excepte he be called, tryed, examined, and admitted, accordyng to the forme hereafter folowinge. And none shalbe admitted a Deacon, except he be xxi yeres of age at the least. And every man, which is to be admitted a Priest, shalbe full xxiiii yeres olde. And every man, which is to be consecrated a Bishop, shalbe

fully thyrtye yeres of age. And the Bisshop knowinge, eyther by hymself, or by sufficient testimonye, any person to be a man of vertuous conversacion [=behavior], and wythoute cryme, and after examinacion and triall, fyndynge hym learned in the Latyne tongue, and sufficientlye instructed in holye Scripture, maye upon a Sondaye or Holyday, in the face of the church, admitte hym a Deacon in suche maner and fourme, as hereafter foloweth.

Then there is as part of the great Litany the following:

1550, 52:	1559:
From all sedicion and pryvie conspiracie, from the tyrannye of the Bysshop of Rome, and al hys detestable enormities, from al false doctryne and heresy, from hardnes of hearte, and contempte of thy worde and commaundement.	From all sedicion and privey conspiracye, frome all false doctrine and heresy, from hardnes of herte, and contempte of thy worde and commaundement:

Good lord, deliver us.

It is thus part of our understanding in Anglicanism that there be Bishops' Priests and Deacons and that they be ordained and set apart for the office and ministry of their order

Our current Ordinals the Collect gives us an insight to our current understanding: Almighty God, giver of all that is good, by your Holy Spirit you have appointed various orders of ministry in your church. Bless these persons now called to the order of priests. So fill them with your truth, and clothe them with holiness, that they may faithfully minister to the glory of your name and the benefit of your church.

In the Exhortation and Examination:

I now exhort you, in the name of Christ
To take up your calling with joy and dedication.
As the Lord's messenger, proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jessie Campbell Nicholson BEM1.2.1925 – 14.4.2009
Oration 2012

Seek the lost, announce God's justice, warn and correct those in error.
You are to encourage and build up the body of Christ,
Preaching the word of God
Leading God's people in prayer,
Declaring God's forgiveness and blessing,
And faithfully ministering the sacraments of God's grace
With reverence and care.
Be a pastor after the pattern of Christ the great Shepherd,
Who laid down his life for the sheep.
Be a teacher taught by the Lord in wisdom and holiness.
Lead the people of God as a servant of Christ.
Love and serve the people with whom you work,
Caring alike for young and old, rich and poor, weak and strong.
Never forget how great a treasure is placed in your care

There is not a word here about the priesthood being a job or a career.

There is a great deal about service and commitment and there is a blueprint for living the priesthood.

But is the priesthood, the diaconate and the episcopate a job, is it just a series of functions that this order can do and this one can't do, is it simply a way of governance and control?

That is the theme of my preaching at the Ordination. My response was that Priesthood, Episcopate, Diaconate are not just functions, they are but if they remain as such they will simply be a job, a job of work to be done.

I have heard it said by many clergy that being a priest is the hardest JOB in the world and I am a bit inclined when I am feeling judgemental to say well get out of it, if it is tough and a Job give it away for your sake and the sake of the people you are supposed to be serving.

But to be a proper priest is to live into that calling of God to service and ministry.

Being a priest is to me a way of life and a way of being, yes it has a lot to do with the deeds of the priest, Eucharist, Blessing and Forgiving, teaching and leading, challenging and encouraging.

To be a proper priest I believe that we become passionate about big and small issues; we speak out calling the people of God to prayer and worship, to justice and equity.

I recall staying in a very cheap back packer's type hostel in Tel Aviv in 1973. It took us some time to get to sleep as outside our window was a taxi rank and the drivers touted for business for hours calling out the destinations they wanted to take people.

Eventually we slept as the business of the night slowed down.

We were woken a dawn by a call to prayer from the mosque next door. The call came at dawn it seemed and woke us from what felt like only a few hours of sleep.

It occurred to me that we too were being called to prayer as a new day started.

That is a role for a real priest, to call the people of God to prayer, come gather with me, come stand at this table, and come before our loving God who calls us to a new day, to a new beginning. Come with me into the deep presence of God. Come with me to love and serve the people of God, all people!!

Now as I was preparing this address I went googling as we all do. I wanted to see how Priesthood was described, but I got diverted and I just began looking at the periphery and the superficial, never the less I did get some information that I think is essential for every Proper Priest.

Now I will only comment on one of the several priestly garments and leave it to you to follow up:

Amice

An amice is a rectangular piece of cloth with religious symbols and two cords, one affixed to each front corner. It originated as a neck scarf, which was still its form and function in the first century. People sometimes also pulled it up to use it as a head covering. It became a vestment in the eighth century. Today, it is mainly in use in the Roman Catholic Church.

When the priest is vesting (that is, putting on vestments), the amice goes on first. He puts the amice on his head, like a bonnet, then his alb. He pulls the cords around his torso, so they cross in the back, and ties them in the front. After he puts his chasuble on, he pulls the amice down around his neck so that it looks like a collar or a muffler.

Like all vestments, the amice has symbolic meaning as well as practical value. While it is temporarily on the priest's head, it symbolizes the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17), and after it is pulled down, it symbolizes the burden he bears. Before Dr. John

Breck invented Ph-balanced shampoo in the 1930s, people didn't wash their hair very often, because washing your hair with soap doesn't produce happy results. As late as the 1950s, there were hair tonics and hair creams that made hair look fashionably greasy. Since the amice covers the priest's hair while he is putting on his chasuble, it protects the chasuble from grease and hair-care products. After he pulls it down onto his shoulders, it serves as a neck scarf to protect his throat from the cold.

An amice is also known as a superhumeral, meaning "over the shoulders."

I know of a rather similar function among some of the women priests.

When they have put on their face!! They put a gauze veil or scarf over their head and then put on the alb or casalb thus preventing the face from being smudged or the alb soiled.

The veil is then flicked out and placed back in the vestment bag.

Now this is a new potential tradition just waiting to come into common use. Will it become a custom among all priests male and female and lose its original use and purpose.

Will all those who use this innovation be Proper Priests?

I want to draw to a close now but before I do I want to say something further.

I want to inform all that I have been saying by looking at the words of the master, the great high priest.

The Tradition of the Elders Mark 7:1-13

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?'

He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,
"This people honours me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines."
You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

Then he said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, "Honour your father and your mother"; and, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die." But you say that if anyone tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is Corban" (that is, an offering to God)—then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many things like this.'

These words challenge us all to a deep understanding of the tradition.

Earlier in Mark's account we read:

Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; Mark 2:27

What is essential, what is at the heart of all that we do and be as followers of Jesus Christ?

Indeed what is a proper priest?

A woman or man called and ordained, who takes seriously the call of the Church and its master. A woman or man who is dedicated not to a job but to a life of service.

Not one who works a two set day, morning and afternoon or morning and evening or afternoon and evening who is so protective of their rights and dignity that they neglect the sick, homeless and suffering.

No we are not called to a job, we are called to a way of being.

Micah 6

God Challenges Israel

Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

‘O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.’

What God Requires

‘With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Proper Priests ponder this.

What is at the very core of priesthood?

What is it that inhibits Proper Priesthood?

What can we sensibly let go of and yet continue to be Proper Priests?

So today the ordained priest is called to reflect the priesthood of Christ and to serve the priesthood of the people of God and to be one of the means of grace whereby God enables the Church to be the Church.

In the Eucharist the Church is very near to the sacrifice of Christ, for the once- for- all offering is brought into the here- and- now by the memorial.

While all the people participate , the priest acts in the name of Jesus in the words and actions of the last supper, and he represents also the church as catholic.

So, too, the other parts of his ministry are in Christ's name: his preaching, his absolving, his caring for people in every kind of way, and his witness to the community.....

at the same time, the ordained priest evokes and serves the ministry of the people of God, and he sees so many of the laity eager to serve and lead. While he is called to bring the expertise and authority of his ordination into this scene, he knows that the expertise and authority are rooted in the humility of Christ.

(The Christian Priest today by Michael Ramsey 1972)