



The Right Reverend Peter H. Beckwith

**The Bishop's Address
One Hundred Thirtieth
Regular Synod
Jacksonville, Illinois
October 26-27, 2007**

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, ON THIS OCCASION OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTIETH REGULAR SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD, I AM HONORED TO ADDRESS YOU AS YOUR BISHOP IN THE SIXTEENTH YEAR OF THIS EPISCOPACY IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. *Amen.*

On behalf of the Rector, Vestry and parishioners of Trinity Church, Jacksonville, the first (or primary) congregation in the State (predating the formation of the Diocese of Illinois by some three [3] years), and this year celebrating the one hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding, I am pleased to welcome each of you to this Regular Synod of the Diocese of Springfield.

The theme of this Synod is “Being a Christian, Being the Church.” If we claim to be Christians, we strive to be what Christ calls us to be -- His followers, followers of His Gospel and followers of His teaching which begins with dying to self and being resurrected to new life in Him who is Savior and Lord. Putting on that new existence, we are joined with every believer -- past, present and future -- as members of His body, the Church, to do His work in the world as evangelists in all that we say and do. “Being a Christian, Being the Church” first has everything to do with God and then everything to do with us and others. If we think “Being a Christian, Being the Church” somehow is about us having access to God as a resource to be used on our terms, our thinking is fatally flawed. “Being a Christian, Being the Church” is understanding that all that we are and all that we have belongs to God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier and that fulfillment temporally and eternally becomes a reality as we discern accurately His will and

commit ourselves to accomplishing it. We are of Christ and as such though we are in this world, we are no longer of it.

Joining us at this Synod, are nine (9) very special guests. Though you will have an opportunity to meet them later in one capacity or another, I want to introduce each of them to you now. I would ask them to stand as I call their names.

The Rev. K. Brewster Hastings, Rector of St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Abington, in the Diocese of Pennsylvania, is with us and is serving as our Chaplain. This is a new initiative for Synod designed to assist us in "keeping the main thing the main thing." In addition to being the preacher at Evensong tonight and the Eucharist tomorrow morning, He will address this Synod in a few minutes. We look forward to hearing his thoughts and insights regarding our mission and ministry as the Diocese of Springfield.

With us is the Rt. Rev. Edward Robinson de Barros Cavalcanti, Bishop of our Companion Diocese of Recife. It is a joy to welcome him again to our Diocese.

Also with us are the Rev. Von E. Watson and his wife, Hartley, representing Bishop John Holder and our Companion Diocese of Barbados. Fr. Watson is the Rector of the St. Mary's Church, Bridgetown, Barbados, with whom we have had a special relationship.

Here representing our esteemed neighbors to the northwest -- the Rt. Rev. Keith Ackerman and the Diocese of Quincy -- are the Rev. Canon Ed den Blaauwen and the Very Rev. John R. Spencer. Fr. den Blaauwen is the Rector of Christ Church, Moline, and serves as the Canon Missioner of the Diocese of Quincy and Fr. Spencer is the Vicar of St. Francis Church, Dunlap, Dean of the Peoria Deanery and the immediate past president of their Standing Committee.

Representing the Anglican Communion Network are Mr. Wicks Stephens and his wife, Pam. Mr. Stephens is the ACN Chancellor and Mrs. Stephens is an ACN staff member.

And representing Bishop Warren Freiheit and the Central and Southern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America is the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Linden-Schade. She is the Assistant to Bishop Freiheit.

We sincerely thank each of you for coming. Your presence honors us and is an encouragement to us in our common service to Christ, His Gospel and His Kingdom.

It is now my privilege to recognize those who have joined us in ordained ministry or whose ministry status has changed since our last synod. Please stand as I call your name.

The Rev. Robert M. Lewis, Deacon, canonically resident in the Diocese of Central Florida, is serving All Saints' Church, Morton. He has completed all the requirements for priesthood ordination which has been tentatively scheduled for the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 2008. He is married, and he and his wife, Ellen, have a son, Edwin.

The Rev. Gene R. Tucker is now the Rector of Trinity Church, Mt. Vernon, having served as Assisting Priest in the Hale Deanery Team Ministry for several years.

The Rev. Canon Dale D. Coleman has become the Interim Rector of St. George's, Belleville. He is canonically resident in the Diocese of the Rio Grande.

Letters Dimissory was received from the Diocese of Louisiana on behalf of the Rev. J. Victor Sheldon, III. Fr. Sheldon is a Commander in the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy Reserve. He is serving on Active Duty at Kings Bay (Georgia) Naval Submarine Base.

The Diocese of Springfield is blessed to have these laborers for Christ among us. It, indeed, is laudable that we, with them, are partners in the Gospel, and we are thankful to God for their ministry.

During this past year, the following Letters Dimissory were issued by me:

The Rev. Canon David C. Anderson, priest, to the Convocation of Anglicans in North America; and the Rev. Canon Ellis E. Brust, priest, to the Anglican Province of Rwanda.

In addition, the Rev. Howard B. Bowlin retired as Rector of St. Matthew's Church, Bloomington. He with his family has moved to a retirement home located in the mountains in eastern Tennessee.

We are confident God will continue to bless these men of God and their witness in the months and years ahead.

Currently we have three (3) Churches actively involved in the search for a new rector. They are: St. George's, Belleville; St. Matthew's, Bloomington; and St. John's, Decatur.

It now is my solemn task to declare a moment of silence as we remember those clergy who have died since our last Synod. They are:

The Rt. Rev. Albert William Hillestad, Eighth Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield and former Rector of St. Andrew's, Carbondale;

The Rev. Canon O. Dudley Reed, Retired Priest of the Diocese of Springfield and former Rector of Holy Trinity, Danville;

The Rev. Thomas M. Gibson, Jr., Retired Priest of the Diocese of Springfield, former Vicar of St. Luke's Church, Springfield, and longtime Chaplain in the United States Army; and

The Rev. Eric B. Asboe, Retired Priest of the Diocese of Springfield and former Rector of St. Andrew's Church, Paris.

We thank God for them and for the ministries of which they were stewards. Acknowledging that "No man is an island, entire of itself," we grieve with their families knowing our whole is diminished by their deaths.

-- (SILENCE) --

Let us pray. May their souls rest in peace, O Lord, and may all who grieve know Your most gracious consolation through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The primary purpose of this address is to report to you on the state of the Church. Not much has changed on the national and international scene since our last Synod, but there is more clarity. It has become more obvious the Church is made up of three orientations whether we are talking locally, nationally or internationally. The first might be referred to as "revisionists." They believe God is revealing to them that traditional moral standards are no longer necessarily appropriate and Holy Scripture or at least the way in which it has been interpreted is no longer to be trusted. The second group might be called "institutionalists" or "loyalists." They do not necessarily endorse the current agendas, but more importantly they are unable to envision the Church apart from what they have known. Finally, there are the orthodox who value most the Gospel as revealed in Holy Scripture and understood as taught through the ages. I am very much aware that the three (3) above named classifications are represented in this gathering and I think it is important that each of us is clear about where we stand.

There should be little doubt in anyone's mind where I stand. But just in case, let me say that I stand unequivocally in the orthodox grouping. More importantly let me tell you why. I believe it is the position that embraces most fully the Christian Faith and the only position that offers any real hope to the world.

The first group denies the authority and catholic teaching of Holy Scripture. Its view of Scripture is based on personal experience and, therefore, it can mean anything an individual wants it to mean. The accusation, "They make it up as they go along," seems to be all too accurate. What perhaps is worst of all here is a failure to understand that if we are selective about what we believe in the Gospels and reject what we find too awkward or difficult to accept, it's not the Gospels in which we believe, but ourselves.

The second group may very well profess an orthodox faith, but is willing to compromise and depart from it when to do anything else would seem to be counter to the interests of the institution. This position has all the hallmarks of idolatry because it would appear to value the institution of the Church more than God and the Gospel. In addition, it has been said that the greatest threat to the Church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not simply the revisionists. Though they are grievously mistaken, an equally egregious threat is an inability to see revisionism and its theology (or lack thereof) for what it is: another religion. To be tolerant of error is to be at least as responsible for the damage done by the proponents of error in the same way that an indulgent parent is responsible for the antisocial behavior of a child. Mahatma Gandhi has said, "A 'No' uttered from the deepest conviction is better and greater than a 'Yes' merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble." Indeed, all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

Unlike revisionism, orthodoxy views personal experience through the lens of Scripture. We know we fall short of the standard God sets for His people and we know we need the saving presence of Jesus in our lives in order to bridge the gap between what we are and what God created us to be. We recognize that the Kingdom of God cannot be achieved on our terms and we understand the audacity of suggesting our words are God's words rather than striving to have God's words be our words.

Since our last Synod, the House of Bishops has met twice. With regret, I tell you that the result of those meetings was to essentially affirm the secular, sexually immoral agenda established and confirmed by the 2003 and 2006 General Conventions. The statements each meeting issued used language, which appears both manipulative and deceptive, indicating The Episcopal Church desires to remain a member of the Anglican Communion, but on our terms, and expressing an interest in exploring the minimum requirements to do that.

Currently the Archbishop of Canterbury has inquired of the Primates whether or not The Episcopal Church's response is adequate enough to allow us to continue as a full partner in the Anglican Communion. The final answer remains to be given. The initial replies to his inquiry have been varied. The orthodox provinces, for the most part located in the third world, have said, "No." The revisionist provinces, for the most part located in the industrialized west, have said, "Yes." And those provinces which appear to be "institutionalists" or "loyalists" seem to have said, "Maybe."

The net result really changes nothing. Both our Church and the Anglican Communion continue to be seriously threatened. Our Church is threatened because the current agenda cannot succeed in doing anything but turn us into a culturally co-opted sect. The Anglican Communion is threatened because the largest majority will not go along with any of it, and it should be noted that the largest majority is in the part of the Anglican Communion that is growing.

In light of the facts that the largest province in the Anglican Communion has said it may not participate in the Lambeth Conference next summer, and that one of the largest provinces has said it will not participate, and that a highly respected bishop in the Church of England has said sixty percent (60%) of English bishops are likely not to participate, a request has been sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury to postpone the Conference until the contention and divisiveness in the Anglican Communion can be sorted out. It has been reported the request unfortunately has been rejected as a result of the current cost of the prearrangements. If that is true, those responsible for that decision have not counted the cost of having a Lambeth Conference in which five sevenths (5/7ths) of the Communion is not represented. Indeed, if that occurs, the Anglican Communion as we have known it no doubt will cease to exist.

In 1998, the Lambeth Conference passed Resolution 1.10 which basically says three things: 1) Every soul is loved by God and has access to the Body of Christ, the Church, and His Grace; 2) Homosexual activity is contrary to the teaching of Scripture; and 3) We are to respect and listen to each other with charity. It is blatantly clear the leadership of The Episcopal Church does not accept nor adhere to that resolution in its entirety. The Episcopal Church continues to profess that homosexual activity may not be contrary to the teaching of Scripture and, therefore, the blessing of same sex relationships (which the Resolution says is not legitimate) and the ordination of non-celibate persons is appropriate. This in itself calls into question the

appropriateness of The Episcopal Church's full inclusion in the Anglican Communion. If the Anglican Instruments of Unity -- the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lambeth Conference -- do not take appropriate action to resolve the situation, the Communion itself may very well self destruct right along with The Episcopal Church.

It's not a very positive picture. I wish there were something on the national and international scene much more uplifting to report. But there isn't and, to suggest there is, would be either terribly naive and/or complicit in a grand deception. Moreover, I wish I could tell you that what is happening nationally and internationally is of little concern to us because we are not significantly impacted by it, but that, too, would not be the truth. The ministry that has always been a difficult pursuit for the conscientious who undertake it is now even more difficult.



Nevertheless, we are called to be faithful in an all-too-faithless environment both outside and, sadly, inside the Church. No one said it would be easy. What we know is that it is very important and it is most worthwhile because that is where salvation and fulfillment only is to be found.

I am pleased to report that in spite of everything, there are positive things happening within the Diocese of Springfield. We have continued the "Yes, These Bones Can Live" program in conjunction with Acts 29. We have progressed from inviting upon us the Ezekiel prophecy, that even dead bones can live when God's Spirit falls upon them, to "Claiming the Vitality of the Early Church" in which people come, are forgiven, healed and receive the salvation God provides only through His Son, Jesus Christ. Our last session developed around the Biblical imperative to "Cry Out to God," imploring His presence and grace in particularly difficult situations. Not coincidentally, I've found myself doing that more and more lately, and I've found it to be immeasurably helpful.

Our Department of Evangelism and Spiritual Enrichment, under the very able leadership of the Rev. Desmond Francis, planned and conducted two (2) Saturday sessions focusing on

“Evangelism Outside the Box,” based on the book and study guide by Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel and Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church, South Barrington, Illinois, called *Becoming a Contagious Christian*. Two (2) more sessions focusing on “Making Disciples” are planned for next year on April 19th and September 6th.

For the second year in a row, our Department of Youth Work planned and sponsored our participation in YouthQuake, an annual Acts 29 youth event which takes place in Ridgecrest, North Carolina, in January. It is notable that numbers nearly doubled last January with a total of ninety-seven (97) participants from the Diocese of Springfield.

Our prayer is that these initiatives will kindle a faithful, spiritual fire that will never be extinguished.

In addition to these new, specific ministries sponsored by the Diocese of Springfield, there are many, many ministries of which we are aware on a local level conducted by our parishes and missions that communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the enrichment of our membership and the empowering of them to be evangelists of that very same Gospel. Those ministries are much more effective than anything we do on a diocesan level because that is always where the proverbial ministry “tire” best meets the “road.”

The evidence of that good work, of your good work, can be seen in the Synod Reports you have before you which will be published in the 2007 Diocesan Journal. Moreover, it can be seen in the membership and average Sunday attendance statistics issued by the Episcopal Church Foundation which indicate that the Diocese of Springfield has not been in the critical decline the larger Episcopal Church has been experiencing particularly over the last few years. But before becoming too proud of what we do, let us not deny the fact that our situation remains very tentative. If we are not successful in the struggle with discouragement and complacency, our situation will become more tentative as ministry levels decline and souls are lost. Let us not neglect this opportunity to recommit ourselves to the faith once delivered to the saints and to the saving ministry which flows from it by keeping “the main thing the main thing” in what we say and what we do by:

Proclaiming the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of all creation -- not merely an option among others;

Teaching the Bible as true and trustworthy;

Evangelizing without apology; and

Expecting lives to be transformed, not merely excused, and families to be made whole, not merely redesigned.

If we commit ourselves to these things, we will become a Church where everyone is welcome and no one remains unchanged. If we commit ourselves to these things, we will become a Church whose members hold their eternal destiny in firm anticipation and are excited about sharing that reality with everyone who might be open to that “blessed assurance.”

If we fail to keep “the main thing the main thing,” our future is bleak, indeed. As always, we have more influence and responsibility than anyone else for what we are and what we do. Make no mistake about the importance of this solemn work to which we are all called. It is of the utmost importance because it impacts redemption, salvation and fulfillment.

NOW UNTO GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT BE ASCRIBED AS IS MOST JUSTLY DUE, ALL MIGHT, POWER, MAJESTY, DOMINION AND GLORY NOW AND FOREVER. *Amen.*