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The Church of the Holy Spirit: Our Roots in the World of the Apostles

What is the source of the continuity of the Church? Scripture? The episcopate? Tradition? No one of these by itself is sufficient, for its true continuity lies in the continuing existence of the Spirit-filled Body of Christ - through time - from the days of the Apostles to the End. This talk first presents the Old Testament and New Testament texts that speak of the Spirit and the life of the Church. It then addresses the nature of the various ministries in the Church, beginning with the 'Royal Priesthood' into which we enter through Baptism. It will then look at the ministry of the bishop ('overseer') and of the priest ('elder'). Finally, it sketches a picture of what the Church is like when it is really functioning as it should.

The Spirit and the life of the Church in Old and New Testament texts

Much of what I am going to say takes us back to Paris, and in particular to Father Nikolai Afanassieff, one of the most important professors at the St Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, which was, as you heard last night, established by Metropolitan Evlogii not long after he arrived there. I would very much recommend that, if possible, you read his book, which exists in the original Russian and in French translation. Its title is *The Church of the Holy Spirit*.¹

Fr Nikolai puts at the very head of this work a quotation from Irenaeus of Lyons:

There where the Church is, there too is the Spirit of God; and there where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all its grace (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv. Haer.* 3.24.1)

To understand the meaning of St Irenaeus' words, which are so simple, one really has to go back in time, for we are talking about an aspect of Church life that goes way back into the Old Testament, to the prophecies, and I would like to point to two particular prophecies. The first is from the Book of Joel, one of the 'minor prophets' (though minor in terms of content, but in that the books themselves are fairly short):

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit (Joel 2:28-29).

This prophecy goes back to something like the sixth or fifth century B.C., but it is only realized on the day of Pentecost. In the Book of Acts, which describes the experience of the Apostles on that day, the Apostles begin to speak in tongues. Those who hear them say, 'These people are drunk. They must be filled with new wine.' And then the Book of Acts goes on:

¹ Nikolai Afanassieff, *Tserkov' Dukha Sviatago* (Paris, 1971) and *L'Eglise du Saint-Esprit* (Paris, 1975).

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, ‘Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day [i.e. they have not had a chance to get drunk yet!]. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ... (Acts 2:14-21).

What Peter has done is to interpret the prophecy as being fulfilled at that moment. The Church of the Holy Spirit in which we live was born on that day.

The second prophecy is also extremely important if we are to understand the Church as Church. This one is found in the book of Exodus, when God is about to take Moses up on to Mount Sinai to give him the Law, and he tells Moses what to say to the people. Moses is told to say to them:

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me [NRSV: ‘my treasured possession’] above all people [*laos periousios* in the Septuagint]: for all the earth is mine ...

- What an extraordinary thing it is to be the chosen people. The whole world belongs to God and He can choose from it what He will. –

... And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation (Ex 19:5-6).

Sometimes, as in the NRSV, this is translated as ‘a priestly kingdom’, but ‘a kingdom of priests’ is closer to what we are talking about. What we see here is that God *wants* ‘a kingdom of priests’. And he tells them, even before he gives them the Law, ‘If you really obey me, you will be a kingdom of priests.’

If you look at that same prophecy as taken up in Isaiah (a text which is possibly even earlier than the passage from Exodus), again God himself is speaking:

But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat of the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves (Is 61:6).

He tells the people of Israel that they will be called the priests the Lord. What is interesting is that this passage from Isaiah comes only shortly after the passage that Christ reads in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Is 61:1-2). And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of

all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Lk 4:14-21).

The verses Christ read in Nazareth appear in precisely the same chapter of Isaiah as the prophecy about the people as ‘priests of the Lord’. It is very difficult not to believe that this prophecy was not also part of Christ’s broader understanding of his ministry. The people he seeks to gather around him will be ‘priests’.

We should note here that that prophecy about a ‘people of priests’ was never realised in the history of Israel before Christ. Only the tribe of Levi was a priestly people, not the whole nation. Until the coming of Christ the prophecy never came into effect.

The Eschatological vision

Now I would like to consider this same language as it is applied to the end of time in the Book of Revelation. John speaks of the people as priests in the very first chapter of Revelation – and comes back to this two more times: ‘[Jesus Christ] hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen’ (Rev 1:6). In Chapter 5, he sees in his vision twenty-four elders, who bow down and say: ‘And [Christ] hath made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth’ (Rev 5:10). In the third passage he says: ‘Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such [a man] the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years’ (Rev 20:6).

‘They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him’ – in other words, they shall be kings the ‘king of kings’, and priests with Christ, the one high priest. So we see that theme of a priestly and kingly people that goes right back to at least the fifth century BC is understood by John as having been realised in the Early Church, and as something that will reach fulfilment at the end of time. It is God’s will for the Church, and therefore for the human race, and is experienced already in the life of the Church.

Let us go back again to the First Epistle of Peter. He addresses his letter to the ‘the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia’ (1 Peter 1:1). To those ‘strangers’ (who are the first Christians) he says:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...’

Why are they chosen? For what purpose?

...that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet 2:9).

This ‘royal priesthood’, this ‘holy nation’ is understood in that same chapter as also being a ‘spiritual house’:

Ye also, as lively (i.e. 'living') stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by (*dia*, i.e. 'through') Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:5).

What we see here is that priesthood, which is personal and individual, has now become corporate reality. The image used here is that of a 'house', an edifice composed of many elements, which is what a house is, a shared reality. What we need to note is that the term 'house' is used again and again in the Old Testament of the Jerusalem temple: the 'house of God', the 'house of the Lord', the place where God dwells. But Peter is speaking to non-Jews, however, who are now the people of God, and are now a 'spiritual house'.

This same imagery is used by St Paul. In Ephesians he says:

For through [Christ] we both [i.e. Jews and Greeks] have access by the one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God [*oikeioi tou Theou*]; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building [*oikodomi*] fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple [*naon hagion*] in the Lord; In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph 2:18-22).

We can see a kind of transition here, from being the people of God, the 'household' of God, to being the 'house' of God, the temple of God, from being a community to being a building, which in turn proves to be the temple, the habitation of God, through the Spirit. Now this notion of the temple is one which Christ applies to himself. We have this extraordinary passage in the Gospel of John, after Jesus has driven the money-changers and sellers of oxen and sheep and doves from the Temple:

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Show us your authority by giving a sign. Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? [And John in parenthesis adds But he spoke of the temple of his body] (Jn 2:21ff).

The Body of Christ, the source of our priesthood

In other words, there is a lengthy sequence of ideas behind these passages which leads first to the Temple in Jerusalem and finally to the body of Christ himself. It is the latter image that I would like to concentrate on at this stage, because it is taken up by St Paul in a number of very important passages. St Paul is strongly drawn to the idea that the Church is a body. In Romans he says:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us ... (Rom 12:4).

Then in First Corinthians he returns to the same theme:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into i.e. 'of'] one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many (1 Cor 12:13-14).

Shortly after this he goes on to say:

But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you (1 Cor 12:18-22).

So the body which has many parts is still one body.

Again in Ephesians St Paul takes the notion of the body and brings it into relationship with Christ:

He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones (Eph 5:28).

St Paul tells us that the husband is to love his wife as if she were his own body. This is the love, he says, that Christ has for his own Body, the Church, the Bride of Christ. And if we are to follow the example of Christ it is also the love that each of us should have for the other in the Church as a whole: as the Head of the Church loves his Body, and we too as members of the Church, should love *our* Body, the Body to which we belong, which is the Body of Christ.

We see here the way in which St Paul uses this language to overcome the problem of the 'one' and the 'many'. He seeks to reconcile the fact that we are many with the fact that we are one in Christ. Moreover, in the background there is also the problem of diversity and of diverse gifts, and he touches upon this on a number of occasions.

To begin with he points out the differences – the many different talents, the many different gifts, the many different ministries that exist in the Church. And yet, he says, there is a fundamental sameness. He addresses this problem in Galatians:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26-29).

In other words, alongside the many differences that exist between the various members of the Church, there is still a fundamental oneness, a fundamental identity, in that all have equally put on Christ. And at that basic level difference is in some sense abolished. We are all alike in Jesus Christ. We are all, as Paul says, the

descendants, the ‘seed’, of Abraham. We are all children (or, more literally, ‘sons’) of God by faith.

In what respect are we equal? We are equal in that we have all have ‘put on Christ’ and are all of us the children – the *sons* – of God through Baptism. So we are entitled to ask ourselves, what is this equality that we have all put on?

The first aspect of this ‘putting on’ I would like to look at concerns the priesthood, and in particular the putting on of Christ in his role of High Priest. This role is developed only in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and this by itself would be enough to make this text one of the most important in the New Testament. In it the author says: ‘So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he [God] that said unto him, Thou art my Son [a reference to Christ’s Baptism and the descent of the Spirit], today have I begotten thee [Ps. 2:7]’ (Heb 5:5). But as the author of Hebrews goes on to say at once: ‘As the Lord saith also in another place, ‘Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec [Ps 110:4]’ (Heb 5:6).

Thus the high priesthood of Christ takes us right back to the Psalms. The Psalms – that is, the perennial worship of Israel – are the source of the Church’s understanding of Christ. They are summed up in the Psalm’s words addressed to the king of Israel: ‘The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek’ (Ps 110:4). Now what is interesting is that this psalm is actually quoted by Christ himself, in Mark 12, where he applies it to himself. He has been discussing theology with the Jews in the Temple, and at the end of the discussion

Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.’ David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly (Mark 12:35-6).

Clearly Christ has applied this Psalm to himself. The fourth verse of that same Psalm is: ‘Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec’.

I think we can agree that it unlikely that Christ would apply one verse of this Psalm to himself and not the other. Psalm 110:4 refers back directly to a particular story in Genesis:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him [Abram], and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all (Gen 14:18ff).

The significance of this story for the Early Church is made clear in another chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author says:

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of

righteousness [Melki-zedek in Hebrew], and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but [being] made like unto the Son of God; [he] abideth a priest continually (Heb 7:1-3).

The author takes this psalm, which Christ had already applied to himself in the Gospel of Mark, and links the fourth verse to Christ as well, saying that like Melchisedec, for whom no father is recorded in the Bible, Christ himself, the Son of God, has no earthly father. He is like Melchisedec in that he too is 'without descent'. Now it is precisely this Christ whom we put on in Baptism: Christ the 'high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec', but also at the same time Christ the royal priest – the King of Salem, the King of Peace.

Baptism, then, is actually the source of our priesthood. In it we 'put on' the priesthood of Christ, the great high priest. When we 'put on Christ', we put on his priesthood as well. We do not, however, all become high priests, since there is never more than one high priest at a time, and from the time of the Incarnation, that one high priest is Christ. And we when we put on his priesthood, we also put on his kingship. As Christ tells us in the Gospel of Luke, we are called to sit on thrones beside him, not below him. And I would like to add that as we put on his kingship, we also put on his role as ruler. And as we put on his prophetic role, we also put on his role as judge. All that is Christ's He seeks to give us. And he gives us these gifts in Baptism. Through Baptism we become a 'royal priesthood' as was anticipated in the Old Testament, foreseen in its fullness at the end of the world in the Revelation of John, and revealed initially and as yet imperfectly on the day of Pentecost.

The origin of 'clergy' in casting lots, and our 'allotment' to Christ

I would like at this point to insert a kind of parenthesis, because in the course of looking at these texts I learned something I did not know before: that is, the meaning and origin of the word 'clergy'.

The Latin word behind our word 'clergy' is *clericus* and it is simply a Greek word, *klerikos* turned into Latin. The Greek word comes from the word *kleros*, a term you will have heard in church and used for the place where the choir stands. If you look at the original meaning of this word, however, you will find that to begin with a *kleros* was a 'lot', as in our word 'lottery' or 'allotment'. The way the Greeks used to cast lots was to have everyone concerned take a piece of pottery, write his name on it and put it into a pot or something similar. Then the pot is shaken until one lot pops out, or someone reaches in and picks out the piece of pottery that tells you who has been chosen. The theory was that the gods were thereby involved in the choice, even if it was a general for an army who was being selected. A strange thing to do, perhaps, but we should remember that when a replacement was chosen for Judas Iscariot, he was chosen by lot (Acts 1:23-26). It would appear that Zacharias was chosen by lot to burn incense in Temple when he saw the angel of the Lord standing beside the altar of incense (Lk 1:9).

The word *kleros* can also mean the whole process of casting of lots.

Then there is an understandable development of the meaning of the word *kleros* to 'what is assigned by lot', as in our expression, an 'allotment', or 'allotted portion'. So

far as I know, this is the only country in Europe that has allotments, and the use of the term does suggest to me that when these were first distributed, you actually got your piece of land by lot. It's yours, but you got it by lot.

That same word, *kleros*, then becomes, in a very general sense, a piece of land, a farm or an estate. In other words it is something physical that belongs to somebody, something with substance. And since land tends to be passed on through inheritance, *kleros* then comes to mean a 'legacy', an 'inheritance', or an 'inheritable estate'. This type of development in the meaning of a word is nothing unusual. It is happening all the time.

Thus the word 'clergy' has an extensive background that needs to be borne in mind. In the Old Testament in particular, in Deuteronomy, there is a marvellous passage where the author says:

The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel, They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord's portion [LXX: 'the fruits of the Lord is their allotment (*kleros*)'], but they shall have no inheritance [LXX: *kleros*] among the other members of the community; the Lord is their inheritance LXX: *kleros*], as he promised them (Deut 18:2).

All the other tribes of Israel had land allotted to them except the tribe of Levi. They each had their allotted portion, their *kleros*. The tribe of Levi, however, was not given land. Their allotted portion was the Lord. They have no inheritance among the other members of the community: 'the Lord is their inheritance, their *kleros*, as he promised them.'

But if they have no land, how do they live? A serious problem. And the answer is that they live from the Temple. The fruits of the Temple are reserved for the tribe of Levi. This may not have been so the practice, but that was the theory. The point is that the lot, the portion, of the priestly tribe of Levi is the Lord, and they must live from what the Lord provides.

If we want to find out how it applies to us as a priestly people, however, we need to go to the Patristic writings. There we find that in the middle of the fourth century Christ has been given 'as his inheritance (*kleros*) angels and archangels ... and ... God-loving souls' (Eusebius, *Dem Ev* 4.6). But this turns the whole process around, because now the Father gives to Christ as his portion the angels and archangels - and God-loving souls. And in another passage, Eusebius speaks of 'the souls that have been allotted to him [i.e. Christ]' (Eusebius, *Hist Eccl*, 10.4.61) – allotted to Christ, that is, by the Father. This notion is already found in the Gospel of John, where Christ says: 'I pray for them [i.e. his disciples]: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine' (Jn 17:9).

Cyril of Alexandria, for his part, describes '[Christ's] personal ... inheritance (*kleros*)' as 'those on earth' (*Commentary on Hebrews*, 1.1). In other words, Christ has been given by the Father not merely the 'angels, archangels' and 'God-loving souls', but the whole human race. And in the same vein St John of Damascus, in his *Hymn on Birth of Christ*, speaks of Christ's inheritance as the gentiles, who are offered to him by God.

So there is a very important sense in which we too are the lot of Christ. We have been given to Christ by God as his portion, even his inheritance. This is made clear in the First Epistle of Peter, where he says:

The elders [‘presbyters’] which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you ... Neither as being lords over God’s heritage (*ton kleron*) but being examples to the flock (1 Pet 5:1-3).

What is translated in the Authorised Version as ‘God’s heritage’ is rendered in the Revised Version as ‘the charge allotted you’, i.e. ‘those allotted you’. In the NRSV *ton kleron* is translated as ‘those in your charge’; Richmond Lattimore, in his excellent modern version of the New Testament, uses ‘your charges’; the Jerusalem Bible, in its characteristic prosaic fashion, translates *ton kleron* as ‘any group that is put in your charge’. But the point here is that in the quotations from the Fathers the reference is to those who have been allotted to Christ, ultimately the whole of mankind, while in the Epistle of Peter those allotted to the ‘elders’ are the members of their specific community, i.e. the people of God in a specific place.

And this leads us to say – and this is what Fr Nikolai Afanasieff says – that the whole people of the New Covenant belongs to God and constitutes the *kleros* of God. Each member of this *kleros* is a *klerikos*, a member of the clergy, because each is a part of the inheritance of Christ.

Having said this, however, we need to take a look at what has happened over time, because we no longer use the word ‘clerical’ in that sense. And if we trace the development of the meaning of the word, we will see that after the fourth century – and in some cases even earlier – the word *klerikos* or ‘clergyman’ becomes reserved exclusively to the ordained ministry, instead of being applied to every member of the Body of Christ. The whole argument of Afansieff’s book is that we must go back to that earlier meaning. We must all begin once again to think of ourselves as ‘clergy’, as ordained ministers, simply by virtue of being members of the Body of Christ. There are marvellous passages in the early texts which point to this.

If we go back to Irenaeus of Lyons, writing at the beginning of third century in his work *Against the Heresies*, we see that he says: ‘*Omnes justi sacerdotalem habent ordinem*’ - ‘all the righteous [i.e. all the members of the Church] belong to the sacerdotal order’ (*Adv. Haer.* 4.8.3). This attitude lasts right down to Dionysius the Areopagite in the sixth century, who speaks of ‘the holy order of the people (*tin tou hierou laou taxin*)’ (*Eccl Hier* 6.1.2), thereby referring to the whole hierarchical structure of the Church. For him the whole of that hierarchy is holy. He can also speak of all who are baptized belonging to the ‘holy hierarchy (*hiera diakosmesis*)’ (*Ibid.* 2.2.4). And the notion of the ‘hierarchy’ itself - something to which all Christians belong – comes from the Greek word *hieros*, which means ‘holy, filled with divine power’, and in turn is related to the word *hiereus*, ‘priest’.

So we have here a entire system of meaning which survived at least into the sixth century. Indeed, it has survived even to the present day in the deep consciousness of

the Church. When we begin to think scripturally, theologically, we quickly realize that the whole of the Church is a holy body, and that the structures within it, bishops, priests, deacons and so on, are structures within a priesthood of the whole people.

At this point I would like to say something about an experience of liturgy which really struck me in Ethiopia. I have only been there once in my life, and it was an extraordinary experience. On Sunday morning you have to get up early to go to church, since you are not far from the equator. The Liturgy begins at about six in the morning. As I made my way to the church I had marked out the evening before, I suddenly realised that the people who were walking there beside me were covered with white. The men had long white linen or cotton garments round their shoulders, and the women had pulled them over their heads. It was most impressive.

And if we ask ourselves why they were doing this, we find wearing white vestments at least at Baptism is mentioned as far back as Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century. But in the tradition of Judaism the wearing of white goes right back to the vestment of the high priest. We usually think of the high priest as wearing very ornate vestments, as described in Leviticus. He does have such vestments, and he wears them all the time in the Temple except on one day of the year – the Day of Atonement, when he – and he alone – goes into the Holy of Holies. On that day he puts on none of these great bejewelled garments, but just a white linen cloak and a golden girdle. The tradition is quite clear. When we are baptised and put on that white garment, we are joining the high priest in entering the Holy of Holies. But we are only entitled to do that because Christ himself has become our great high priest – ‘after the order of Melchisedec’ – and has entered the Holy of Holies himself. We are assimilated to him, in that we have ‘put on Christ’.

That experience in Addis Ababa is an experience of the liturgical realisation of a theological truth. If you go back to the Syriac *Didascalia* of the fourth century, you will find that in describing the Liturgy it says:

After that let the deacons bring the offerings to the bishop at the altar and let the presbyters stand on his right and on his left, like the disciples before their master; and let the two deacons standing either side of the altar carry a fan of fine skin or peacock feathers or cloth, and let them chase away gently any little flying creatures, that they should not fall into the chalices. And then, let the high priest who is praying inwardly – as are the other priests – dressed in a bright and shining vestment (*lampran estheta*) and standing before the altar, having made the sign of the cross on his brow, say ... (8.12.3-4)

And then there follows a description of the prayers of the Liturgy. But here, in this particular liturgical realisation, only the bishop, as high priest, seems to be wearing a white garment. Everyone else is wearing more ordinary clothes. So again it would appear that we have here a liturgical tradition which goes right back into our Jewish roots, into the practice of the Temple, and is being used in the eucharistic Liturgy to link the bishop with the one true and eternal high priest – Christ – in the celebration of the Liturgy.

One thing that is fascinating about the ordination of a bishop as this is described by Hippolytus at the beginning of the third century – and this is the earliest description of

how this is done – it that immediately his ordination he celebrates the Liturgy as the chief celebrant, in spite of the fact that every other bishop present will be senior to him. This is a practice we no longer follow, and in any case it would be appropriate only in the case of the ordination of a diocesan bishop in his own cathedral. We do, however, ordain to the priesthood immediately before the consecration of the Holy Gifts, so that he can pray with the bishop and the other priests when the consecration begins – in other words, just at that point where he is taking up his role in the Church. Similarly, a deacon is ordained after the consecration, so that he can immediately take up a characteristic role of distributing communion to the people, in the early days of the Church it was the deacon who took the Gifts out to the people. Thus each of these three order is ordained for the particular liturgical function that characterises their life of ministry in the Church.

When is the ordinary believer ordained? Just before the beginning of the Liturgy. According to the oldest traditions, the baptised person goes in to the Liturgy immediately after Baptism. He too must be thought of as being ordained for a particular ministry – and after ordination takes up his role immediately. The conclusion that one must draw from this is that the whole body of the Church and each of its members is ordained to offer the bloodless sacrifice. We actually find this in Origen, who is writing about 250 A.D. In his commentary on the Book of Leviticus, he says, as a teacher to the people whom he is teaching: *‘Habes ergo sacerdotium, quia gens sacerdotalis es, et ideo offerre debes Deo hostium laudis* ‘Therefore you have the sacerdotal office, because the people are a sacerdotal people, and therefore you ought to offer the sacrifice of praise’ (*In Leviticum, Hom. 9.1*).

Let us remember that this expression, ‘a sacrifice of praise’, occurs at the beginning of the anaphora: ‘Mercy, peace, a sacrifice of praise’. Today the choir tends to sing it, but Origen links it to the sacerdotal, priestly nature of the whole people. And he says to his auditors that because you have this priestly nature, you – and not just the bishop or priest or the choir – you yourselves should offer the bloodless ‘sacrifice of praise’.

What does this mean for our own self-understanding? Clearly we are a priestly people, a priestly people that is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, the exhortation of the Book of Exodus, and the expectation of John. We have existed as this body of priests since the day of Pentecost, for, as Peter says, on that day the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled. The descent of the Spirit takes place upon the Apostles, and through them it reaches the whole body of the Church. And that Baptism of the Spirit is carried forward liturgically, sacramentally, in the Baptism that we still perform, and which, as St Paul says, is a ‘putting on’ of Christ. The Christ that we put on in Baptism is Christ the high priest. In other words we are given, through our integration into the body of the Church, a priestly role, which is also a kingly role and a prophetic role. But in the first instance it is the role of the priest. And that gift is something that belongs to everybody in the Church. It is important that everyone should realise that they have assumed this role personally.

Going back now to last night’s talk, we are in a position to think of the Church as a historical body existing in time and in space. Every one of us is a member of that historical Church just for only a relatively short period. We come and we go. We are born into it in Baptism and depart from it in the first death. I was struck by the way in which Archbishop Gabriel spoke last night about Metropolitan Anthony and

Metropolitan Evlogii. They appeared, they did their job, and others have to carry it forward.

The Church is constantly renewing itself. It is constantly changing. We come and we go; we are replaced by others. They may be very different from us, but the essence of the Church is not changed even if it is constantly being renewed. It is being renewed essentially by God, who draws forward in time this visible manifestation of the Body of Christ, this extension through time of the Incarnation of Christ, this continuing temple made up of human beings in whom the Spirit dwells.

When we look at the life of the Church in this way and link it with Christ's words, 'Behold, I make all things new', we see that it is Christ himself who is behind the constant renewal of the Church through time. We are part of that process and we need to take it seriously. We need to rise to the level of our own high calling.