

**Quiet Day for Clergy of SSC
(Chapter of the Resurrection)**

Chapel of the Holy Cross, Archbishop Holgate Hospital.

Br Steven CR - Conductor

19 September 2016

“Priesthood & the Cross”

The Society of S. John the Evangelist and the Society of the Holy Cross

First Address:

Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who gave yourself to be for us a perfect sacrifice upon the Cross, and did call us to be conformed to your example of suffering while sharing in the benefits of your redemption, grant that we may never shrink from the Cross, but rather may esteem it as our richest treasure amongst all the things of earth, and may be accepted by the Father to suffer along with You, by the power of the Holy Spirit, even as by the same Spirit did offer Yourself for us, and has purchased on the Cross a Kingdom where Your faithful followers shall reign with You forever, for Your mercies' sake. Amen.

This year marks the 150th Anniversary of the foundation of the Society of S. John the Evangelist, known throughout the Anglican world as “*The Cowley Fathers*”. You may well wonder what SSJE has to do with yourselves as Priests of the Society of the Holy Cross. Having read the various colour-coded Rules of SSC in your own history I found a number of traits sharing common ground with the first stable Religious Community of Men to be established since the Reformation. Richard Meux Benson had joined the Society of the Holy Cross in 1856, and had become its Provincial Vicar in Oxford while he was Vicar of Cowley

Ten years later in 1866 he and two priest companions Simeon Wilberforce O'Neill and Charles Chapman Grafton made their profession on the Feast of S. John the Evangelist 27 December as the Mission Priests of the Society of S. John the Evangelist. Notice the word *Mission Priests*. From its inception Benson formulated his Society to engage in Missionary work, having been much influenced by Father Lowder and his own membership in the Society of the Holy Cross. But unlike SSC, Benson's new brotherhood would include laymen as well, so it was that Lay-brothers from the beginning had been associated with the Society following the same Rule.

If we look at the Religious Life and your own vocation as priests of the Society of the Holy Cross one recurring theme appears: both are bound by Rule. And we may find many similarities between the Rule of SSC and that of the Cowley Fathers: The Religious Life is so called as being a life under rule. It is the life of one permanently dedicated to God. A vow, on the other hand, is a solemn promise which we made to God of some holy action in which we intend to serve Him in a better way than could otherwise be done.

This morning we shall uncover some of these traits which no doubt you are familiar with that will resonate in your own priestly vocation. So when I speak of the Society of S. John the Evangelist, I'm also making reference to the Society of the Holy Cross. The Rule of SSJE will undoubtedly relate to your vocation and ministry and it doesn't hurt to remind ourselves of that discipline, duty and calling as we seek to do God's will.

The Call of the Society: In the beginning was the Word who, being himself one with God by indissoluble unity of life, called into existence the whole universe of creation in accordance with the will of the Father; and the Word of God, having become incarnate for our salvation, consecrated himself through the Spirit in perfect obedience to God, even to the death of the Cross, in order that he might bring the fallen world back again to be consecrated in truth. It is the call of the Society of S. John the Evangelist, in adoration of this divine mystery, to seek that same consecration to which God in his mercy calls us, and in so doing to seek, as far as God may permit, to be instrumental in bringing others to be partakers of that consecration. We should always keep in mind that above all things it is necessary for those who would carry out work of any kind to abide in Christ, apart from whom we can do nothing, and that if we abide in him the life which we have must show itself in acts of love to all mankind. For, as Christ loved us, so must we also love one another; and we must be ready to lay down our lives for our brothers, if we would be true to that eternal life which is in the Son of God.

The Life expressed in worship and prayer:

The Divine Office At the heart of our life lays the desire to be united with Christ in giving praise and thanks to God. We offer this praise especially in the Divine Office, so fulfilling within the Church our call to prayer for which we are given special opportunity. Our corporate offering thus gives us mutual support, and through all changing moods enables us to offer as worthily and joyfully as possible this constant action of worship.

The Eucharist The worship of the ever blessed Trinity is primary in the Christian life. This worship finds its highest expression in the offering of the Eucharist. The opportunity of sharing frequently in this liturgical action enables us to renew that offering of ourselves which is central in our life through sacramental union with Christ. Our corporate unity in this action is to deepen the reality of our common life, and draw us towards a faithful expression of this in our worship and in our daily tasks. Some will find it a help to make an act of spiritual communion on days when they do not receive Holy Communion.

Intercession

Intercession has its place both in our common and our private prayer. There shall be an opportunity for corporate intercession at a convenient time each day. Continuous intercession shall be made upon one Rogation day and on one Ember day in each season.

Mental Prayer

Not all will use this time for prayer in the same way, but whether by meditation, helped at times by prayerful reflective reading of Holy Scripture, or by a simpler lifting up of our hearts to God in which our affections may be kindled, or by a silent contemplative waiting upon God, we are to look up to our Lord Jesus in the glory of the Father. Although we do not see him with the outward eye, let us remember that he sees us, and rest in the security of his love. Let us wait till he comes. The vision will surely come, if we persevere in looking up to Jesus he will not fail to give us all we need. This looking up to him may be maintained during the day by short acts of prayer.

I. The Life expressed in Spiritual Discipline

Confession

Because of our need, Christ in his mercy gives us repeated signs of his forgiveness and through absolution restores us to the joy of salvation by renewing us as sons of God. Members of the community shall go to confession regularly. Confession shall be made to such priests as shall from time to time be appointed to hear the confessions of the community.

Silence Silence is one of the chief joys of the religious and gives to all his actions strength and tranquillity; for in silence he holds communion with God, feeds upon the grace of sacraments received, contemplates the true hope of eternity and rises up to do God's will with joyful love. Quiet is essential for the spirit of recollection, and is demanded by thoughtfulness for those who are praying, reading or writing.

Retreats

There shall be a retreat of six consecutive days (as near Christmas as convenient), and of a fortnight later in the year. On days of retreat there shall be silence and three prayer times.

Fasting and Mortification

The discipline of fasting and mortification has its place in the Christian life, and each of us should value the opportunities given by this means to prepare us spiritually to contend for Christ. We should be glad to bear the small mortifications which arise day by day in particular we should avoid complaining about the food of the house except to the Father Superior.

Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and the Vigils of the Annunciation, S. John the Baptist, S. Matthew and S. Thomas shall be observed as days of fasting according to the custom of the house.

II. The Common Life

Brotherly Love

The habit of recollection and of watchful alertness, together with the avoidance of haste and noise, is an important help to communion with God and the spirit of prayer. This communion will express itself in a warmth, a spontaneity and a naturalness in our relations with one another, and in a friendliness to all whether brothers in the community or guests. This warmth and friendliness is fully compatible with the observance of silence, for it flows from the love of God which silence is meant to foster. Brotherly love among us will be shown by courtesy to one another, as well as by showing reverence in the customary ways to the Father Superior (Master) or when he is away to the Father Assistant.

Conversation

Our conversation should be ruled by charity and so should not cause unnecessary pain to any person present. To preserve the spirit of mutual trust within the Society discretion should be used in speaking of its life and work to those outside. Even among ourselves, care should be taken not to speak in any way that might damage the family life. We are at liberty to speak freely about the state and condition of the Society to the Superior General, the Assistant General or the Father Provincial, as being in a special sense the guardians of the well-being of the Society.

Recreation

All should meet together at the hour of recreation for companionship, relaxation and refreshment for our work. At these times conversation should deepen our fellowship in community.

Brotherly Encouragement In the demands which our life and work make on us, we should seek to encourage each other by a spirit of mutual concern and friendly interest. When it is necessary to give correction we should always try to do so with all the meekness and gentleness of Christ, taking care not to wound a brother's heart with any unnecessary pain.

Reading and Study In the rapidly changing world in which we fulfil our mission it is important to keep our minds fresh and informed. We should therefore give time for reading, and whenever possible we shall aim at a period for study each day.

The Sick Man's life cannot be without a share of suffering, which the Christian may recognize as an opportunity for deepening his trust in God. God gives his blessing to the sufferer and to all the community.

As we look up to Jesus the Spirit who upheld him will uphold us in the greatest discomfort and pain. Times of solitude during illness will often be found very helpful to communion with God, undisturbed by the distractions of external work or study. Sickness may necessitate our being in hospital. There we may find little opportunity for solitude and direct communion with God. As far as possible we shall bear witness for Christ by patience and cheerfulness and by a ready acceptance of the ministrations of others. If we are able to help any of our fellow patients we should do so with thankfulness. God is with us in sickness, and even if the physical condition makes it impossible to carry on our usual prayers, the pain or weariness may be offered to Almighty God with confidence in his mercy.

And now we come to our fourth section which sums up our own priestly dedication within and beyond the parishes we serve.

On Mission

When sent on mission we go out from God to act for God, while dwelling in him. All that is done must be offered to God. It is only in this spirit of complete confidence in God and by continuing in prayer to him that we can expect to do anything which will have lasting results. The union with God, at which we aim our prayer and life, must uphold us as much when we are on mission as when we are at home. For this we need to be strengthened by the use of Holy Scripture and by constant watchfulness and prayer. Whenever we may be sent to meet others we should aim at being a sign of Christ's presence to them, so that together with us they may be brought to share in consecration of life. We should act always in the tenderness and patience of Jesus, and consider what he would expect of those to whom we minister, knowing as he does the various things by which they may be held back. Let us try by this tender love to win them to a corresponding tenderness of contrition and personal love to Jesus. The firmness of a father should be combined with the tenderness of a mother in dealing with them.

Prayer::

Almighty God, Who by the power of Your Holy Spirit did send forth Your Apostles to make disciples of all nations, and to baptize them into Your Church: quicken, we beseech you by the same Spirit the Church of these latter days, that with wisdom and fervent zeal we may preach your Gospel to those who dwell in darkness, till all men everywhere are brought into the clear light and true knowledge of you and of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE SECOND ADDRESS

Prayer: Grant O Lord to the Society of S. John the Evangelist and the Society of the Holy Cross such an increase of numbers as may best enable them, your servants, to carry out the purposes of their vocation, and whether they be many or few, grant that your word may have free course among them and be glorified, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,

It was Father Congreve who had asked Father Benson what the object in founding the SSJE was. To which Fr Benson replied: “*The object of our association in a Religious Community is to equip us to go out as missionaries---we do not come into the Community primarily to convert others, but rather with the desire first of all to be converted ourselves. Then, if by God’s grace, we are converted to Him, he may use us in missionary work, or in any other way that He pleases.*” I am sure you would agree that in order for us to convert others to the faith of Jesus Christ, we need to be converted ourselves first.

Looking back to what we heard this morning. The SSJE rule of Life is not much different from your own. Both SSJE and SSC are brotherhoods – the former as a Society of Mission priests and lay-brothers engaged in mission preaching and teaching of the spiritual life by means of retreats and spiritual direction, the latter as a Society of priests dedicated to the work of mission for the advancement of God’s Kingdom on earth under the banner of the Holy Cross.

When I was preparing for this Quiet Day I had been reading The Letters of Father Benson, this particular one was *to a Mission Priest newly ordained*. This letter was *on the Priestly life* written on the Feast of S. Thomas 1888:

How full of marvel and power the life of a priest ought to be, would that we could realize it more truly. What entire loss of self-there should be if we recognize the presence of the Holy Ghost, Whom we receive, as accomplishing in us the work of the priesthood, so entirely beyond all human power--- -at once miraculous in its extent, and mysterious in its character---the spreading of the life of another world throughout the organism of the material creation. May we have grace to carry on this work faithfully. We of many years standing in the priesthood feel the need of much reparation for wasted powers. You who are just beginning must look to Him to uphold you, and assuredly He will. He never calls us to do anything for which He does not give the power. We accept His charge, and say with humble confidence in His help, “We are able”. (*S. Matthew XX. 20*) May this blessed sufficiency of His grace be continually experienced by you.

Another letter written, this one to Father O'Neill who was working in India at the time:

Maundy Thursday 1875 - The Power of the Cross

To-night we seem to be watching on each side of Gethsemane; you from the East, and we from the West. May we so watch around the Cross that we may come to sit down with those who are partakers of His promise in His heavenly kingdom. We must be living true to the Crucified. We cannot overleap that step in evangelical life. It is not enough for us to point to Him; He must be manifest in us, still crucified in the world, though glorified by the world beyond. Such a number are carried away with the dream that, as Christ has died, we may live in this world in the results of His triumph. It is like claiming to take possession of an enemy's capital by lodging in a hovel on some battlefield of victory. This world can never be to us anything but a hovel and a battlefield. The country we claim is on the other side of the dark river. The less we have to make ourselves feel at home here the better. The most dangerous times are when all things are smooth.

The way of God's precepts is the way of the Holy Cross, wherein we follow the example of Christ. God must teach us to understand this way. The more we continue to walk in it, the more shall we see its goodness. There must be an understanding heart, and this the Holy Ghost alone can give. We must search into the mysteries of Christ's Passion; his filial love to the Father, his redeeming love to man, his interior joy in holiness, his hatred of sin, His triumphant endurance whereby he showed himself the conqueror of Satan. It is only the humble penitent who can attain this wisdom. The more we understand God's precepts, the more shall we behold his wonders. Each revelation discloses fresh wonders to the humble penitent.

S. Paul's preaching evidently had much more to do with that which came after the Cross than with that which led up to it, ---- Christ in glory, and ourselves bearing the cross, that we may rise to the glory. We can never rise to the patience, boldness, perseverance of Christ, unless we are living in and calling others to share the glory of life wherewith he abides as our high priest at the right hand of God. (*Heb. 8:1*).

During this Octave of your Society's dedication, it seems fitting to share with you some considerations based upon meditations [*of Father Benson*] offered on the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross:

The Cross goes before us, and it is not a cross of flowers, nor a cross of precious stones. It is a cross all bloody with the blood that is ever fresh. It is the blood of Jesus that is perpetually fresh upon it.

Consider the loss of the Crucified Life in our days. Without the Crucified Life we cannot be true to Him who died upon the Cross.

Consider the importance of the Crucified Life- The Cross is the gate of Heaven, whereon we must hang if we would know the glory of the Life beyond. By the Crucified Life of Jesus we were redeemed, and by a Life Crucified with Him our sanctification is perfected. No faculty that we possess in the world can be offered to God except upon the Cross. Our energies are often our destruction. It is by dying to [the world] (sin) that we really live to God.

Consider the recovery of the Crucified Life – We must be with much effort carried out in a spirit of true faith. We must attack the enemy in his own country, by setting ourselves against those worldly maxims which carry away the Cross, and prevent its being the standard of our lives. We must carry the Cross with the bare feet of poverty through the Heavenly Jerusalem. The outward poverty of the Cross must be our glory in the Communion of Saints. Therefore Love of the Cross, Holy Zeal, and the cherishing of poverty. These considerations encourage us to show forth our Love for God through His saving Passion, the Cross. The Cross is the test of faithfulness. Christ was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. He is the true and faithful witness. To us it is said: “Be thou faithful unto death.” (*Rev. II, 10*). God has given us a *will* wherewith to serve Him, and there can be no acceptable service without free *choice*. We must choose the way of the Cross. Without such a test the choice would have no value.

Some of you may have heard or read Father Benson’s *The Way of Holiness –* an Exposition on Psalm 119. It was introduced to Thomas Merton by Donald Allchin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer had asked for a copy. Section IV comprising verses 25 to 32 has been titled *The Discipline of the Cross* using Benson’s analytical and devotional commentary. If you have not read it, it is worth reading and provides much food for thought, relevant today as it was over a century ago especially as we face challenging and difficult times ahead in our parishes and in the Church of England at large.

To end this part of the Quiet Day I offer some words of encouragement to the Society of the Holy Cross from Father Benson: *Let us pray in spite of all discouragement, even when the future seems to be unfolding to us a life different from all we had hoped. Look with faith to His cross, and see Him there identified with your weakness. Look upward to His glory, and see yourself identified with His might. Look to the cross, and see Him one with yourself, in the struggle of sin, although without sin. Look to the Glory, and see yourself one with Him in the energy of holiness, although burdened with so many sins.*

Feast of S. Andrew 1877 - The call of Christ, onward and upward.

May our good Lord call many to follow Him, and give grace to us all that we may persevere and follow Him, as He ever calls us onward. Although our state is fixed, yet the call of Christ is ever onward and upward; to live more fully in union of heart and mind, of will, of word, of deed along with Him. The very solitude of our lives is one of the forms in which He calls us to follow Him, and He is with us, working with us most powerfully in proportion as He puts all else away from us. He is our companion and guide in solitude, binding us to Himself by His Holy Spirit, and He by the power of the same Spirit binds us together in every bond of holy association and brotherhood.

Let us pray: *O Lord God, Who has given your only Son to triumph upon the Cross for our sakes against the Evil One, grant that we may so learn to take up our Cross and follow Him, that we may enter into the Heavenly Jerusalem in the full joy of Your triumph with all Your Saints, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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