

THE ORDINARIATE – SOUTHWARK ARCHDIOCESE

The evening 'Webinar' was organised by the Unity Commission of the Archdiocese with a view to understanding the current situation in our part of South London. Bishop Paul Hendricks introduced the topic and our speaker for the evening, Fr Christopher Pearson from The Borough Parish. The way the Ordinariate works within this parish was to occupy much of the talk and the discussion which followed.

Bishop Paul spoke of the opportunity to experience Receptive Ecumenism through the Ordinariate. The particular gifts and patrimony offered by Anglicanism is incorporated in the Ordinariate's approach and we can draw from the richness presented by this. Going forward, it could be a model for advancing Unity.

Fr Christopher, an engaging speaker with a relaxed manner, started by explaining the background developments in Pope Benedict's time. Here in England, the 'Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham' was set up in January, 2011. There are two other Ordinariate groups, in North America and Australia.

In England, St John Henry Newman is a patron, unsurprisingly given the significance of the 'Oxford Movement' of the 1800s. Benedict's 'Anglicanorum Coetibus' document in 2009 and his visit to the United Kingdom in 2010 with the Beatification of Newman, as well as Benedict's direct experience of the denominations while he was here, must have influenced the progress towards establishing the Ordinariate.

Anglicans of a High Church persuasion had formed the 'Forward in Faith Group' to advance their cause and determined three requirements: to select and train their own priests, the ability to make their own decisions and to engage in free ecumenical dialogue. After Benedict's offer they realised they had three choices: to continue ecumenical dialogue outside the Ordinariate, to set up a new group in place of Forward in Faith, or to join the new Ordinariate which lay people could also join.

Bishop Paul pointed out that the Ordinariate is part of the Latin Rite group of Churches, in full communion with Roman Catholicism.

The Ordinariate in England & Wales has its own Ordinary, Mgr. Keith Newton, to whom all the Ordinariate clergy look for direction and guidance. Those working in parishes also work under the Diocesan Ordinaries, in our case Archbishop John Wilson. Fr Christopher explained how his predecessor, Archbishop Peter Smith had made the local Ordinariate group of priests very welcome. He also established the Borough as a parish in which the Ordinariate could function alongside the life of the Catholic community and liturgy. Fr Christopher was appointed the Priest in Charge of the joint community.

Borough parish has inherited the Anglican practice of high lay involvement. Fr Christopher does not get involved in finances at all and the two communities are separate but with some overlap in organisation and finance. Their 'Governing Council' is the equivalent of an Anglican PCC. For a lay person to join the Ordinariate, it is necessary for their formation to be given in the Ordinariate way. A Catholic could not simply join the group. It emerged that some High Church Anglicans still feel that Ordinariate members have been disloyal. Fr Christopher emphasised charity and tolerance in all things. As in Neman's day, some friendships have suffered.

Included in the Anglican patrimony is 'Evensong'. The distinct English of the 'King James' Bible also features along with other prayers in time honoured language, such as the Penitential Rite. All Catholics are welcome to attend any Ordinariate Services.

A variety of questions followed, ably directed by Robin Orton. The session ended exactly on time with much appreciation expressed and Bishop Paul thanked our main speaker, Fr Christopher.

Fr Michael Lovell