

## Homily for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 4 2010, Choral Mattins

The Very Reverend Douglas A. Stoute  
Dean of St. James Cathedral and Rector of Toronto

Throughout history we have confused the process of renewal with that of destruction.

Famous novels record the crumbling of old worlds and the building of new ones: Guiseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, chronicles the disintegration and rebirth in Italy; Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* about the last gasp of the British rule of India. The poetry of WB Yeats *The Second Coming* speaks of the unraveling of the present world order and a yearning for an age which is yet to come.

Those that push for evolution and change have always been considered destroyers of tradition rather than pioneers or pilgrims in a new world.

This is particularly poignant as we gather to worship almighty God on this 4<sup>th</sup> of July. On this date in 1776 the American Colonies declared themselves independent. This experiment was no less formative for them than it would be for us in Canada. It is here that the die was cast that, in time, would establish the two remarkable nations of the North American continent.

Over the years our countries, now the best of friends, have fought and argued and have, in time, learned to work together in peace, harmony and mutual respect. Today we share the longest unprotected border in the world. President John F. Kennedy conferred a matrimonial blessing on our two nations when he said:

Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

These two countries did not spring to life without pain and destruction. It is important to remember that those who came to the new world often clashed with those who were already here. They also clashed with each other. Yet somehow they were able to save valuable traditions—our system of justice which together with our parliamentary democracy have fashioned an inclusive, fair and just society.

This is also true of the Church. The Church is currently undergoing a rebirth. It is at times destructive. In the Anglican tradition, there are those who believe that the Church cannot and must not change at all. They seek to defend the traditions they believe are inalterable. This is understandable.

Others believe however that the Church, grounded by inclusion and openness is becoming more important and relevant in the world. This belief, championed by many in the Canadian and the American Anglican Church has put us at odds with other parts of the Anglican Communion. Indeed, within the world-wide Anglican Communion the North American Church is in danger of being marginalized. Some think this is a sign that we are on the right track.

This polarization within the Anglican Church is not new. From its inception, opposing forces have struggled with each other. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was about Catholics and Protestants; in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was about Anglicans and Puritans; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was about High Church and Low Church. Today it is often labeled Liberals and Conservatives.

But, throughout our history, Anglicanism at its best has sought to find a balance between differing views; a *via media*, a middle road. This approach does not mean that we are relativists or have no strong principles. It is recognition that we do not have all the answers to the myriad of problems facing us. It is a recognition that at the heart of the Christian journey there is an element of mystery. We believe that worship and the Eucharist are central to Anglican self-understanding. It is this worship and awe that propels us to reach out to others with the Gospel of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

James Carroll (a Roman Catholic writer) wrote this in the Boston Globe:

What if human beings are never in possession of the truth, but must constantly seek it in the new experience in a dialogue of respect and mutuality with others?

Is that not the answer rather than the question?

These last four days have been a celebration of North America, a Canada and an America that all those who came before us could only have dreamed about.

We owe it to our forbearers, to ourselves and to those who follow us to remember that we are at our best when we constantly seek our way in the context of respectful, inclusive dialogue with all God's people. This is not easy to do. It requires that we put aside the certainty that we are right. It requires that we let go of our pride to reach out – to listen – to open our minds and our hearts.

The Chinese proverb says: a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. For the sake of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God, let us take that step.