

Homily at the Investiture

Bishop David Reed

Saturday, June 3, 2017 2 p.m. TMI—The Episcopal School of Texas

The Eve of Pentecost & the Feast of the Martyrs of Uganda

Ezekiel 37:1-14 1st Song of Isaiah Revelation 21:1-5a John 7:37-39

Come, Holy Spirit: fill the hearts of your people; and kindle in us the fire of your love. In the Name of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good afternoon. Muy buenos tardes, and thanks for coming. If I said, “thank you” to all those I need to say “thank you” to, we’d never get out of here, and I would be like Ezra reading the scroll of the Law among the ruins of Jerusalem, propped up by acolytes, from sunrise till noon. My thank-you gift to you today will be to *not* do that. Know that I am grateful beyond words for all of you, and not just for today, but for the countless ways that you, and so many others—both living and among the saints in light—who have shown up, and walked alongside, and refused to give up on me, time after time.

On February 23, 2006, I sat in First Baptist Church, San Antonio, and watched as Bishop Jim Folts passed the diocesan crozier to Bishop Gary Lillibridge. It was a great celebration. Beyond being both happy and worried for my good friend, Gary, I don’t remember much; but I’m pretty sure I wasn’t sitting there thinking, “Man, I hope *I* get to do that someday.”

Still, how can I be anything but grateful for this life and ministry to which God has called me by his Spirit, through you, the clergy and people of West Texas? As the prophet Joel says, “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in a wild sense of humor.” (Joel 2:13, my translation) I am humbled by your trust, and strengthened by your prayers, encouragement and forgiveness. Bishops—like all clergy—are called before we are ready, and sent before we are equipped, to take on tasks that are beyond our abilities. And that’s true for bishops

and other clergy because it's true for the whole Church, for every blessed one of you: we are called, and we are sent.

There is plenty of pomp and circumstance today—more than Bishop Lillibridge and I like. (He's leaving at the Peace, so he doesn't really care. But he's going to miss the juggling clowns and dancing bears at the end.) I'm okay with it, so long as you all don't start thinking you're spectators at some royal court ceremony. No bench-sitters or innocent bystanders in our worship, ever—but participants, witnesses—the evidence—in God's saving activity reheard and rehearsed here...**so that** we might get out from this place, for Christ's sake and strengthened by the Spirit, and do this glorifying and praising God, this abiding in Christ, as consciously and confidently away from here as we do when we are gathered together.

Let me say a word about the procession this morning, which was done with elegant precision—mas o menos—and plenty of hoopla. I get the significance, and it's good that bishops are at the back of the parade because otherwise we might not find our way to the front. But what makes me uncomfortable is not my “moderate churchmanship,” or that I grew up in a Morning Prayer parish that was modest in its pageantry, or that a procession like this contains echoes of a triumphalism that none of us should feel, or even because I'm a middle child and you know how we don't like fusses.

No, I think what makes me most uncomfortable about the parade and pageantry, deep down, is that the only parade we know Jesus took part in was on Palm Sunday, and we know where that was headed.

I can accept all this, if we don't forget where we're headed together with Jesus, if we will give ourselves to the work of remembering the life to which we are called by the grace, mercy and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. I will go along with this, if you will go along with me...this way, following Jesus...toward the Kingdom. Like a wedding, this liturgy grew and got more complicated. But also like a wedding, it calls us to look with hope toward what is still to come, and offers a pattern for life together going forward.

So that I can be bold enough to enter as the choir beautifully sang the 23rd Psalm only because I know that the Lord who is my shepherd is your shepherd, too, and our shepherd's love is fierce trustworthy. I can be audacious enough to take the pastoral staff and serve as a shepherd only because Jesus is our one, true Good Shepherd; and therefore, the whole Church—all of us sheep of his pasture—are called to rise up on our hind hooves and be shepherds of the Kingdom with him.

Is that something we can do? I mean, look at us. Really. Are we up to this? We've got lots of challenges in almost every part of the life of the Church, and though I've got a long list of cultural influences that make life difficult for us, it's mostly *us* who trip us up. Can we do this Kingdom work?

I don't know...maybe ask Ezekiel. In a terrible time of exile and national dismemberment and amnesia, the Spirit of God asks the dis-spirited prophet, "Mortal, can these bones live?" and then shows him. If God's Spirit can take dried out and scattered bones and knit them together and bring new life into them, what then might the Spirit do in our churches and in our lives?

Or maybe ask the eleven surviving disciples and the women followers of Jesus what the prospects looked like after Jesus was dead and buried. There was resurrection, and ascension, and then, the Spirit came upon them like a hurricane and a wildfire; and if the Spirit could do *that*, could birth the Church out of nothing as surely as the Spirit breathed upon the chaos at the beginning of creation, then who are we to think we're not up to this mission? Who are we to say that our God cannot and is not making things new all around us, in our churches, in us? I've said this for eleven years and will keep saying it until you beg me to stop: God has given us everything we need to be his Church in our time and places. When you're back home tomorrow celebrating Pentecost, look around and consider that. You've been given the Spirit of Christ—what more do you need?

Our theme for today's Abide In Me Conference—like this year's Council theme—is from Revelation 21, St. John's vision of the consummation, the completion, of God's creation: "Behold! I make all things new!" This passage, and our theme, are not a call to our churches to shelter in place and await the sweet by-

and-by. Our hope and expectation of an end—God’s purposeful completion—frees and empowers us to live, love and serve more fully in our own places. We know that we are participants with Christ in God’s saving mission. When the Lord proclaims, “Behold! I make all things new,” we are hearing the wondrous news that, in Christ—in his death, resurrection and ascension—all previously existing views of “that’s just the way things are” are being transformed. The assumed and entrenched ways of the world, the ways that worth, value and meaning are assigned and defined in this world have been upended by the Way of Jesus. Like the Palm Sunday parade, God chooses to make all things new in an extravagant and complete self-offering, entering fully into all of this life—every bit of it—with arms extended on the hard wood of the cross, that everyone might come within the reach of his saving embrace.

And that posture, that attitude, that openness to life is the way—really, the only way—we can go with Jesus toward the Kingdom. May the Spirit awaken us anew to the liveliness of this kind of life, in which we are empowered to join with Christ in his abundant self-offering. As he says in today’s Gospel, “Out the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” And he said this about the Spirit.

I’m going to change how we end this today. (What’s the point of being a bishop if I can’t mess with the liturgy?) Instead of processing out at the end of the parade, I’m going first. I’m inviting my fellow bishops to go with me. This isn’t a sneaky scheme to get to the refreshments first, but because real shepherds don’t stay in the back, but lead and move among the sheep and know them by name. And shepherds are called to lead the Church outside...passionate and open-armed...where Jesus is calling us, into the pain, anger and division of our world.

And I’m going to ask the acolytes, vergers and little kids to go last, the place of honor in the parade, so that we can thank those who remind us that we are all called to be, first and last, the children of God and servants of all.

I *will* head to the refreshments, where it’s appropriate and a crucial reminder to me that the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down his

life for our salvation. I will be blessed to serve you. It is the work of shepherds. It is the life of the Church to go this way with Jesus, toward the Kingdom. AMEN.