



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST
A PROVINCE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION
DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF

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Diocesan synod

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Hebrews 10:23-25

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope unwaveringly, for the one who has promised is faithful, and let us consider how to prompt one another to love, and to good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as has become the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

The one who has promised – God who has promised – is faithful.

This is the sixteenth synod of the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf during the time that Julia and I have been around—actually, there have been seventeen synods during our time. But the point is, this synod, with its unfolding, always varying but in some measure constant mix and pageant of characters and faces, has become as much a part of our lives as the parishes, projects, and above all the people of this unrepeatably and precious diocese. Thanks, from us, to you and your predecessors for all you have been and are.

And here we are again, this time at last in person once more. God, who has promised, is faithful.

Christ has been faithful to his promise, delivered to Simon bar Jonah, St Peter the Apostle, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his Church: Matthew 16:18. The recent pandemic and the substantial financial as well as pastoral challenges it led to have been daunting, dismaying, sometimes frightening. I know how hard it has been for all our parishes, all our laity, all our clergy, all our councils. But most have faced down the gates of hell. Most have recovered the confession of our hope that, as Christ promised, neither those gates nor all that is hellish can or will prevail against his Church, because it is his Church.

It is *his* Church, not ours. Or, to put it another way, it is his Mystical Body: *we are* the Body of Christ; we are invited to sense, taste, know, and proclaim that in every eucharist. Or, to put it another way, it – she, if you like – the Church - is his new creation by water and the word; his bride, even. These are images, metaphors, but the more powerful for that, and true.

So what are we the Church for, if his? For praise, adoration, and worship of God the Holy Trinity first, and in the same breath, as an expression of that praise, for the world. For the world? Yes, because God

as Father so loved it that he gave his only-begotten Son; and not to denounce or condemn it but for it to trust him and regain health and salvation; to flourish with abundant life, full life.

Whatever matters are debated this week and whatever decisions are made, it is as his Church thus described, understood, and lived out that we shall debate them and make them. We are corporate. We are an interconnected body; all bodies are. Without one another, or without due regard for one another, we are lesser, we are diminished, the body is impaired, we flourish less. Or, to celebrate that most noble of Jesus's I Am sayings, we are the branches of the vine that is Christ: cut off from him *and from one another*, or acting as if we are, we are so much less; abiding in him and intertwined, so much more.

And, abiding in him and intertwined with one another here, in this diocese, it's even delightful. There hasn't been a synod in which I haven't been enriched, moved, sustained, and encouraged by you and your predecessors, both synodical members and synodical guests, stakeholders, and observers, and I hope you have been or will be too.

We have already introduced ourselves or been introduced. Let me again rejoice in particular and on our corporate behalf that Archbishop Hosam Naoum of Jerusalem, Robert, Bishop of Exeter, Julius, Bishop of Thika, and Bishop Anthony Ball, Assistant in the Province of Alexandria as well as Canon of Westminster and Chairman of the Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association, have travelled to be with us this year along with other real friends of this diocese: friends in the most inclusive sense of the word.

My dear clergy, dear parish representatives, dear guests, dear friends, and our dear and faithful staff without whom synod would be impoverished, welcome to synod 2023, in which we shall, I trust and believe, *prompt one another to love, and to good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another.*

In the name of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the incarnation of the uncontainable one among us as one of us, the suffering servant now risen, ascended, and glorified, who is the Church's true Lord.

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