

## Sermon Notes for Trinity XXII

*Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy name (the Collect)*

Even two words (household and godliness) are enough to make a sermon.

Household is perhaps a surprising word to describe the Church. Our instinct is to think of the Church in much larger terms - as if it were a nation, or a big membership organisation such as the National Trust, or a Trades Union, or a political party. And of course with that goes the elected leadership and the membership who feel that they are valued for their money (or votes) rather than as making a personal contribution.

Well, God has forced us in our immediate experience of the Church to think small (even while we gladly recall the many thousands even in the Traditional Anglican Communion, let alone the entire One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church) worshipping beside us today.

What is this 'household'? Not quite the 'nuclear family' but a larger group, with several generations and servants included in its membership. This was common in the ancient world.

There is a head - the Father. There are many members, and they relate to him largely by instinctive loyalty (not, for servants, by contracts of employment), knowing their tasks and getting on with it. The household is essentially personal relationships. This is true even of household slaves in the New Testament!

Of course we do not have to adulate ancient households. Any model proposed to us will, as we find it in the world, come with original sin, and probably actual sins, attached. But here is an image of what the Church is like - and it is much more personal, much less institutional, than we might expect.

We ask God to keep this household in 'perpetual godliness'. It isn't the special effort that matters, but the godliness we can keep up month after month.

This godliness is not just behaving decently. No doubt we must do that individually (the collect rightly mentions 'good works'), and, so far as our lives bring us together, collectively as well. We all know how easily strains build up in families!

It is very important to learn from this idea of 'household' that godliness is our response to God as one body, not as individuals. In our current situation, we have to live fairly separate lives; the more important our coming together as we can.

This idea of the godly household underlies our common worship. Christian worship owes virtually nothing to the temple, and not an enormous amount to the synagogue (which was itself a fairly informal and 'lay' organisation requiring neither priest nor rabbi nor, originally, a building). There is a very important sense in which our worship is a based on family prayers (including the blessing of bread and wine which were essential to a Jewish family meal) though of course it is as an organised body under a bishop that we worship.

Of course I am not trying to devalue our worship; and to make it artificially 'homely' (when the modern world has lost the sense of what a household is like!), or informal would be a disaster. But we are here together as 'thy household the Church' in miniature:

Still we are centred all in thee,  
Members, though distant, of one Head;  
In the same family we be,  
By the same faith and spirit led.

(Baxter 'He wants not friends that hath thy love')