

Address to the General Chapter of the STS 2017
The Rev'd Patrick Rooney, Senior
Text: 1 Timothy 4:6-16

In just three short months I will arrive at what I like to call that biblical terminus wherein, as the psalmist reminds us in not too gentle a fashion, “70 is the sum of our years” ...although the same psalmist is quick to add that it is 80 if we are strong...which indicates for me that there are a lot of strong...or perhaps more appropriately for this group I should say some really stubborn folks here among us! But then I also liked the definition from our esteemed Secretary, Pastor Bailey, who told me that she referred to age 70 as the Biblical warranty with 80 being the extended warranty! But it cannot be denied that reaching this mark, this point in life, certainly focuses the mind, heart and soul and causes one to reflect upon life, family and above all, for those of us gathered here, ministry. And life is good. Both our kids are happily married and I have my first grandchild (pictures are available later upon request...or simply pressed upon you as the situation demands!) and I have been blessed with reasonably good health. I am involved not only in the life of the Society but I volunteer my time in other community activities which bring me both great pleasure and satisfaction in giving back to my community. Which leaves me with only ministry to ponder upon further...my ministry and our common ministry together.

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.” Last year I addressed the Society on the text calling upon us not to lose heart as we engaged in ministry...a theme which seemed to be appropriate for that point in time. This year, in an attempt to continue a series of reflections upon ministry in these opening addresses here at General Chapter, I want to take a moment, step back and, from my soon to be new aged vantage point – please note that is new aged not New Age – and to reflect upon the broader gifts given to those of us called into ordained ministry by prophecy and the laying on of hands.

The Pastoral Epistles are filled with descriptions of ministry and many of them are real gems, (notice that is gems and not pearls cast out before...) real gems which provide an opportunity for us to reflect upon our ministries with some regularity as we go about our daily lives. However this passage from First Timothy addresses, perhaps better than any other, both the gift **and** the responsibility given to those of us called into this office of ministry and also as members of this Society. Indeed chapter 4 of this First letter of Timothy is at the heart of this discussion on ministry because it calls Timothy, and similarly those of us who are

also called into the office, to devote the full measure, that is the **full** measure, of our energies to “the public reading of Scripture, to exhorting and to teaching.”

This is not a half-hearted endeavor into which we have been called. It is not something that we can put on and take off as casually as we might change a jacket and slacks...or in our case a cassock and surplice! With the discipline of the yoke around our shoulders, with the publicly proclaimed office entrusted to us, with the awesome and awe-filled responsibility to proclaim God’s Word and administer His sacraments and to stand *in persona Christi*, we as ordained ministers cannot see this simply as a job, a task to be accomplished and then set aside, a role to play which can then be put off when we are finished playing the part. This text is a solemn reminder that the office entrusted to us demands the fullness of our being, the full measure of our time and gifts to see to “the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”

These demands placed upon us are not the end of it however! There is also public worship, which is our chief responsibility, and such worship includes prayers, singing, proclamation and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. All of these components form an integrated whole in our lives and in the lives of those we are called to serve. These parts cannot be separated, dissected one from the other. They are of a whole and, as such, they are the corpus of our life and work and being. And if we are sometimes drained by this work...for it indeed demanding beyond belief at times...although we do not loose heart as we said last year...then we are reminded that a constant dialogue with Scripture is also an essential part of our work.

As the Second Letter to Timothy reminds us so well, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Thus the public work of the pastor is strengthened through the private work of immersing oneself daily in the Holy Scriptures. And surely our Rule, while not speaking directly to this daily reading of Scripture, nevertheless weaves the use of Scripture into so many sections, especially in and through the daily recitation of the Offices, so that the principle of *Sola scriptura* is honored both in our lives and in our ministries.

But in all his caring for his office, Paul also reminds Timothy that he is called to take care of himself. Now I will be the first to confess to you, my sisters and brothers that I am just about the worst person to stand up here and talk about care of self. Frankly I have done a lousy job at it over the years which is why my good friends...and you know who you are...have prodded me, admonished me and sometimes even smacked me upside the head...sometimes the only way to get it into my thick Irish skull!

But apart from my own pure stubbornness and stupidity regarding this matter, I have to admit that I often react to this emphasis on self-care with a visceral distaste because I believe that sometimes it can be a little over done. While it is indeed important to care for oneself...taking days off regularly, going on holiday with family or friends, relaxing with a hobby...our training of pastors today has over-emphasized this self-care to the point where the sense of complete commitment, the giving fully of oneself as described above, is now conditioned and conditional...to the point where I knew of a pastor who refused to visit a family when the husband died because it was their day off!

But then Paul is not necessarily talking about this type of self-care...days off, regular vacations etc. Rather he is talking to Timothy about taking care of himself by, as Chrysostom would say, being the “first to follow the advice he gave.” To “take heed to yourself” then is not a gentle nudge to take your day off each week but rather a reminder to all of us in ordained ministry to ensure that our lives and our actions align with the words we speak, that our own walking matches our talking. As one commentator put it so well, this consistency between words and action are essential “lest you may unsay with your lives that which you say with your tongue.”

And surely that is one of the purposes of our Rule, one of the reasons we have bound ourselves together in this Society, in order that we might have help conforming our lives to our call. Indeed that is the whole purpose and meaning of Chapter 2 in our Rule. Entitled “A Life of Obedience to Jesus,” this chapter speaks of how we are called to live...not just sometimes or occasionally or when the mood suites us or we feel constrained to do so. Rather it calls for us to constantly live in a consistent manner between our call and our living so that here too there is that complete integration and wholeness, “lest your example contradict your doctrine,” as Richard Baxter puts it.

The Spirit has imparted upon the Church a variety of spiritual gifts, as delineated in Ephesians chapter 4. And among these gifts are that some should be pastors and teachers, the very gift given to Timothy and to us. But this gift was not

for him to hoard or to hide but rather to call him into a ministry of preaching and teaching the Word. The commissioning to this call had been accompanied by “prophetic utterance” when the Council of Elders had laid hands upon him, this early form of the ordination rite, in Timothy’s case probably by Paul and the elders of Derbe and Lystra. Those of you who have heard my presentation on “The Authority of the Priestly Office” know how strongly I feel about this act of laying on of hands...in direct opposition I might add of those in the Pietistic and Protestant wings of our Lutheran tradition who maintain that such laying on of hands is not necessary because it is the call itself which constitutes the act of ordination.

But for me, and I believe for us in this Society, the act of laying on of hands, signifying the imputation of the Holy Spirit, stands as the outward mark of ordination which affirms the inner call. And here an aside to the Seminarians among us...when it comes time for your ordination and particularly the laying on of hands by the council of elders, do not...for the love of all that is holy...do not have what looks like an unruly rugby scrum with a mass of pastors smothering you, a mini mob all seeking to touch the hem of your garment! There are far more dignified and seemly ways to have the council of elders lay hands upon you and I would be happy to discuss that with you if you so desire.

But now, having been given these gifts, having had those gifts confirmed by prophetic utterance and the laying on of hands, Timothy and by extension all those called and ordained into ministry, are to make energetic use of those gifts and to give themselves fully and wholly, to stir the flame within them as Athanasius puts it, so that the Gospel “is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”

And finally, “these are the things you must insist on and teach.” Here and most succinctly, Paul is addressing the matter of authority in the pastoral office. Again many of you have heard me speak on the matter of Authority and the Priestly Office in my presentation which I base upon Chrysostom’s lovely little work entitled “On the Priesthood.” So now I quote Chrysostom once more when he says “Observe that it becomes a priest to command and to speak authoritatively.” Chrysostom carefully distinguishes between situations where it is fitting and just for the pastor to command and other times when it is fitting to teach. “But where,” Chrysostom goes on, “the salvation of others is concerned, command and interpose with authority. This is not a case for moderation but for authority.”

Those are powerful words from Chrysostom about the exercise of pastoral authority which, as Thomas Oden states so well, “is in this sense less often abused

than simply not used.” And Paul is urging the use of such authority on Timothy, emphasizing that the youthful pastor must learn rightly to resist those who might undercut or demean him solely on the basis of his younger age or limited experience. That Timothy must have been around 30-35 at this point seems a little strange...but I suppose it is still young when compared to those of us reaching that biblical terminus to which I referred earlier!! And when called upon to teach and preach to those twice their age, as Pastor Stout will do at our closing service – no pressure Pastor, no pressure at all – they are to keep in mind the firmness of their authorization. So to the younger brethren among us, I say to you from my soon to be more aged point in life, use this reminder of the authority you have but use it well. As one author reminds us, “the youth of pastors will not be despised if they do not by youthful vanities and follies make themselves despicable.” And if all else fails, younger brethren, then remember that Our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ was only 30 when He began His ministry!

But youthful or not, all of us called into this ministry are “to set the believers an example.” Or, as another author puts it so well, “Those who teach by their doctrine must also teach by their life, else they pull down with one hand what they build up with the other.” Compassion, faith and moral integrity are called for in ministry and these are far more important than age alone – young or old. Yet it is once again Chrysostom who rushes to remind us that example alone is not enough. “By distinguishing the two,” Chrysostom says – that is doctrine and life – “he shows that practice is one thing and doctrine another and that each needs the help of the other in order to complete edification.”

So Chapter II of our Rule will be our guide, whether one is just getting started in ministry, as our Seminarians and some of our younger pastors are, or others, older like me, who now take that longer perspective on ministry seeking to discern the good, the bad and the ugly of ministry over the years. But whether young or old, let us all heed to the words of Paul and “continue in **these things...these things...**this call, this ministry, this service, this Society, this Rule, this faithfulness...for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.” May it be so! Amen