

1] In the year 597 St Augustine landed on these shores and proclaimed the gospel to King Æthelberht in the old pagan Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Kent. King Æthelberht was married to a Christian princess, Bertha, daughter of Charibert I the King of Paris. She had with her a chaplain, Bishop Liudhard and so maintained her faith. But through Augustine the King and his kingdom became Christian. As the king goes, so go the people.

2] To the modern mind, with its individual human rights and freedom of belief, this seems archaic, wrong even. Why identify with the king's religion when you can choose your own? The body politic is not my own body, we might now say.

3] Once more today we make our annual visit to the house of Zacchaeus. This passage from the gospel of Luke, read whenever we bless new homes, invites us to consider how we make a new beginning: through repentance, through amendment of our life, through our sharing in a common life in Christ.

4] As with many episodes in the gospels, most significant is what Our Lord declares at the end of the story: 'Today salvation has come to this house.'

5] The way to salvation, the way to the restoration of our real humanity in the New Adam, is opened up today, not just to Zachaeus alone as an isolated individual, but to this house as well; the house of Zachaeus has found the way and shares in the blessings poured out upon the head of the household.

6] To many in the modern world this will sound strange to say the least. Ever since those two great changes in western thinking that came with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, and the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, people have come to see themselves as autonomous and separate individuals, complete in themselves, with their own distinct rights and freedoms. This understanding of Man took a long time to develop,

yet now in our own day, even national identities and other ancient loyalties are fragmenting.

7] We see this in the fact that traditional marriage is becoming undermined in social attitudes, and even by governments. Many now seem unable to commit themselves to life-long relationships, when they are seen as restricting of the self. How many are now driven mad because they know that they belong nowhere; that they are a part of nothing?

8] This is not the idea of mankind shown in the pages of the Old Testament; the Hebrew scriptures reflect a very different view of human relationships. Here, a human being is indeed someone, an hypostasis; a single example of our common human nature, made in the image of God. But he or she also possesses a joint identity, a corporate personality: they belong, and are part of something wider than just themselves in isolation. This idea is unashamedly patriarchal, for the biblical man is a series of concentric relationships. This was a man's house, a corporate personality that was shared, first, with his wife, then his children, his servants and slaves, his animals and finally, his possessions and goods.

9] This is shown often in the Bible where a man's servant is seen as an extension of his personality and can act as his agent, and when instructed, speaking in the first person, as if he were his master. One small example I might cite is in the Book of Judges, where Jephthah sends a messenger to the king of Ammon: 'Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?' [Jud.11:12]

10] But there is more here than just a man being the nucleus of a series of relationships. This reflects, naturally, how the ancient Hebrews thought of God, in whose image they were created. For the whole court of heaven, too, related in the same way to the God of Israel. The very angels themselves, created messengers of God, were similarly extensions of the divine, 'Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire.' [Ps103:4] When the three angels visit Abraham and Sarah, promising a son to Sarah in her

old age, they speak as God, God Himself speaking through them, as they say in the Book of Genesis, ‘And the Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old? [Gen.18:13]

11] All this prefigures what we have come to know of the mystery of God. The three who visit Abraham beside the terebinth trees at Mamre, were to be fully revealed in the Theophany, the showing forth of the Holy Trinity at the Baptism of Christ, as we have recently celebrated. For God in Orthodox Theology is a Tri-unity of three divine persons in one Being of God, each sharing fully, with the others, in the common divine nature. The Godhead is a community in whose kingdom, into whose household, we are invited. As St Paul says, writing to the Ephesians, ‘Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.’ [Eph.2:19-20]

12] Our ancient enemy, of course, detests that unity, that communion we have with Christ, our membership of Christ. The devil relishes nothing more than to divide us from Christ and from one another. As soon as he fell, as Christ said, like lightning from heaven (cf. Lk.10:18) Satan had no part in the life of heaven and can only sneer in sarcasm against the holy ones of God. When he discover the righteous Job blessed and protected by God, Satan says in the first chapter of the Book of Job, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? ...But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’ [Job.1:9-11]

13] The evil one’s latest ploy is very evident for any Christian who can discern the spirits, as St John tells us to. (cf.1Jn.4:1). How easy it has been for so many to take in the spirit of this age; the truly agnostic, knowing nothing of their true humanity that was created in the image of Christ, and have fabricated their own rootless identities. Under the guise of ‘social justice,’ self-identification, declaring what you feel you want to be, and moreover, demanding

the right to be recognised as such by everyone else, is the penultimate fragmentation and atomisation of any society. I say penultimate, for the ultimate will only be when Antichrist finally sits as the 'abomination of desolation, (cf. Mk.13:14) trying to usurp God's throne. Do not be taken in by anyone, nor any politician, whether here or north of the border, claiming the moral high ground: this is satanic, no matter how many old and venerable institutions might espouse such causes!

14] 'I must stay at your house today,' says Our Lord to Zacchaeus, and the house of Zacchaeus becomes the house of God. There is an old legend that tells of how, for the rest of his life, Zacchaeus watered and cared for that sycamore tree from which he first encountered Christ. The repentant tax-collector, the publican, the collaborator, corrupted by the old Roman imperial system of tax-farming, rediscovers his true humanity and in his new-found generosity, reveals the likeness of God.

15] So it is with us when we participate in the divine energies, and through compassion, and through forgiveness, and through charity, we reveal that we too belong in God's house; that we confirm, thereby, that we are but servants of our master, Christ. But not just household servants in the kingdom of heaven: we have even become the children of grace, sons and daughters of God: 'Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.' [Lk.6:35]'

16] Our salvation in Christ is corporate; it is in the Church, the body of Christ. That is why it is such a scandal when communion is broken, as currently between the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Patriarch of Moscow. There is no such thing as the lone Christian seeking eternal life as some individual quest or pursuit, just as there can be no separate, independent Orthodox churches. Christ Himself is the archetypal man, revealing to us not only perfect God but perfect man as well. Our whole endeavour, together, is to grow into that and to fulfil that potential that is created in every human being. 'For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' says St Paul to the Colossians. 'And you are

complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.’
[Col.2:9-10]