

**INSTITUTION OF READERS  
ALLEN HALL, LONDON.  
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22 MARCH 2014**

Fr. John Hemer may remember what I said to the students at Allen Hall some years ago at a day of recollection. I told them that if I had my time as a seminarian, priest and bishop over again I would study, pray and seek to understand the Scriptures far more than I have done. Because the older I get, the more I am convinced that in the midst of all the other ways we seek to listen to God, it is in the Scriptures that we discover the revelation of His mind and heart. He revealed Himself in the historical circumstances and lives of the people of Israel. But today He speaks to us, the new Israel, God's Church and people, as we make our journey of faith. Of course that word isn't just written, isn't just an academic study. It is personified in the life, death and resurrection of the Word made Flesh, the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

I love the phrase which says: "You should say your prayers with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other". Perhaps today it should be the computer, or the internet, or your twitter account. Perhaps even your Facebook. Certainly not mine! The point being, of course, that each of us must allow the revelation of God to shine on every circumstance of our lives, not just as individuals but as members of a community. We must bring into focus the sometimes conflicting and confusing realities which are part and parcel of our existence. We do that so that God's story becomes my story, and my story becomes part of God's story. In that living encounter the His-story of salvation can be written in my life too. Pope Francis speaks about "reverence for the truth" in *Evangelii Gaudium*, recognizing that "we are neither masters or owners of God's revelation but its guardians, heralds and servants". (Pope Paul VI: *Evangelii Nuntiandi* – 71)

Those of us who are directed, ordered, ordained to tell that story not just in words but in action too, need careful preparation. Step by step, day by day. Intellectually, Personally, Spiritually,

Pastorally. You will know Pastores Dabo Vobis better than I do. The integration of those elements, that wholeness, that holiness to which we are called can't ultimately be separated out. The word is being made flesh in us. That is one reason why those offering to serve God's priestly people as priests are asked to take conscious steps, make conscientious decisions about both their willingness and their ability to undertake this ministry of word and sacrament.

The words of the instruction to candidates for the Lectorate are striking. "You will be given responsibility in the service of the faith which is rooted in the word of God. You will proclaim that word in the liturgical assembly, instruct children and adults in the faith and prepare them to receive the sacraments worthily. You will bring the message of salvation to those who have not yet received it".

The prodigal son in today's gospel is a perfect example of how not to read and teach and prepare people to receive the sacraments worthily. He knew the script. He had rehearsed it well. He spoke to himself in justification. Selfish. Manipulative. Exploitative. It is easy for us all to go through the routine, to practice the ritual, to allow a gap to grow between the external appearance and the inner landscape of our lives. But unless there is inner conversion then our teaching, our preaching and our living will lack authenticity. No wonder the words of the instruction speak powerfully again:

"In proclaiming God's word to others, accept it yourself in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Meditate on it constantly, so that each day you will have a deeper love of the Scriptures, and in all you say and do show forth to the world our Saviour, Jesus Christ".

The prayer of Institution says it all:

"Grant that as they meditate constantly on your word,  
They may grow in its wisdom  
And faith-fully proclaim it to your people."

Amen