

From Bishop Johnson at General Convention in Columbus, Ohio

Day 3 in Columbus: First Legislative Day, June 13, 2006

Today was one of those rare convention early mornings where there was no committee work for me to do. As a result, I finally got in a much needed workout in our hotel's micro-gym. My committee work did begin at 9:00 a.m. and after that I attended the morning Eucharist at which the Presiding Bishop preached. He spoke of it being "dangerous" to involve the Holy Spirit in what we are doing. "What if we were to take Him seriously?" Bernard of Clairvaux was quoted regarding our faithfulness being found as we heed both the book of Scripture and the book of experience in order to discover God's guidance for this time. Ephesians 1 was cited as a reminder that we are to make every effort to maintain the unity of spirit in the bonds of peace. The Presiding Bishop asked us to ask ourselves two questions: (1) "What do I bring to the General Convention by way of attitudes and opinions?" Here he noted that we are all driven at times by urgencies not of our awareness. (2) "What gifts do I bring to the work before us?" He then suggested that after asking these questions we should, as it were, hold them in our open hands and give them as gift. He then gently reminded us (me), "You may need to do this over and over."

We also sang a traditional Zimbabwe hymn in translation that I found both simple and profound: "If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free, and set God's people free, and set God's people free; the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free." West Tennessee, "where God's promise in Christ is good news for all people," lives out our faith in this confident hope that the One who "must come down and set God's people free" is acting even now. This is not because we manipulate God into "coming down" but because God is already here as we experience the presence of the One who came in Christ and stays with us in Christ's spirit of life.

After the Eucharist, I joined other members of the Bishops' Rules of Order Committee on which I serve, and we completed some unfinished business from the prior day. I slipped into the back of the meeting room for the Special Committee dealing with the response of the Episcopal Church to the issues growing out of the Windsor Report regarding our ongoing relationship with the Anglican Communion. At that time, I heard my favorite line of the day. A portion of a resolution under consideration was being finely parsed to the point of overworking it. One committee member recalled, with attribution as "an old Japanese proverb," that "It is difficult to administer eye drops from the second floor." Words to remember and, given the nature of conventions, words to live by! The meeting drew to a close when the co-chair of the committee observed that there was no debate at all as to whether the convention committee wanted to stay with the Anglican Communion. The debate was all on "how" we might best do it. This was an important observation that was met with murmured assent.

The afternoon Legislative Sessions occurred in both Houses. The House of Bishops stood in recess before the House of Deputies completed their agenda for the day. The House of Bishops, being smaller in number, were able to begin our legislative work more

quickly than the House of Deputies. However, once the “senior House” (Deputies) gets under way, I am confident that they will be generating enough work to keep us busy all day long. Our deputation decided not to have a deputation caucus tonight since most had evening legislative hearings and meetings still pending. During the day, I stayed in touch on the home front with a parish considering the sale of their rectory, dealt with a vocational discernment matter concerning one of our priests, and saw here in Columbus only about half of our deputation (and that only in passing with all but two). Jeannie and I ended the day with dinner, and I returned to the room to find once again that emails don’t stop even when you travel. In closing, a number of people have spoken of the positive atmosphere surrounding some of the more controversial issues we have begun to address. I pray that this bodes well for the rest of the Convention and for the hope with which I began today’s reflections: that through prayer and believing, God’s Holy Spirit is coming down to set us free for service and adoration.

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