

Blest Be the TITHE that Binds
Dr. Bob Hawkins

As we approach the holiday season [Christmas muzack and seasonal decorations already are with us!] stuff begins to pile up – things to do, shopping to start, cooking, baking, and inviting family and friends, not to mention the RSVPs and “happy holidays cards” to send. The mind-numbing busyness is no less true for holy Mother Church. Our worship / music committee has been negotiating the annual appointments, including trees, poinsettias, candles, services, and changes of paraments and vestments. This coming Sunday is just one of many examples: Sunday is the twenty-fourth after Pentecost and the festival of Christ the King because it is also the last Sunday of the Church Year. Like Ginzu® knives, however, “Wait!!! That’s not all!” This Sunday is Consecration Sunday for our congregation, adorned with the annual congregational meeting, time and talent ponderings, budget, and that most high and holy rite, a covered-dish dinner. Mercy, our heads should be spinning!

Consecration is a word we don’t use all that much, yet we’ve been learning about “consecration” since we were babes-in-arms. The word itself is a Latin construct: *con* + *sacrare*, meaning “...having to do *with* the sacred / holy.” Sacred, sacrament, sacristy, sacrifice, along with sanctity, sanctification, sanctify, and even saints all are intimately related words. They reflect the importance and particularity of folks like you and me spending time with “holy persons and things.” We are marked by holiness whether we know it or not because the God of creation blew divine breath into our lungs of clay and dust. We actually depend upon our proximity and commitment to the holy, the sacred, and that is what we once again explore as a congregation this coming Sunday.

The late Queen, Elizabeth II, an exceedingly devout Christian by all accounts, spoke to her wide-flung kingdom on her twenty-first birthday on 21 April 1947, just five years short of the heavy burden of the imperial state crown which settled on her: “I declare before you all that ***my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted*** to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong. But ***I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in it with me***, as I now invite you to do: I know that your support will be unfailingly given. ***God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.*** ERII *got it*, say and think what you might about monarchs, royal houses, and such. She was indeed *consecrated* that June day in 1953 because that’s the point of a coronation. The consecration within the English coronation rite is acknowledged as the “most sacred moment” of the lengthy liturgy. It wins hands down over crowns, robes, orbs, scepters, state trumpets and coaches, choirs, and all the pomp and circumstance a nation quite practiced at monarchy can muster.

While the rest of us will unlikely ever feel such responsibility and connectedness to the global community, we all share in the common bonds of communities. Thus, we also enact “consecratory” rites and traditions, vows and declarations throughout our lifetime, some more public than others. The most familiar, perhaps, is 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* marriage vows which inform a good number of vows and claims still made during weddings: *I take thee ____ to my wedded wyfe / husbände, to have and to hold from thys day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for porer, in sickenes, and in healtre, to love and to cheryshe, tyll death us departe; according to Gods holy ordinaunce, and therto I plight the my trowth.* Holy ordinances are invoked, and people

recognized and accepted as wedded and bound together. Together folks vow to share absolutely in all things, including mutual support and commitment one to the other, bonds that hopefully only are loosened in death. Such holy vows are crafted to declare intimacy and companionship not easy to invent, but dependent upon collected wisdom across generations and communal support. Idealistic brides and grooms sometimes venture silly promises, impossible to fulfill. Those having a growing number of anniversaries under their belts can only shake their heads and pray for the wedding party yet more fervently.

Understanding the bonds of commitment on which consecrations rest begins early in life. That perpetual font of wisdom, *The Andy Griffith Show*, frequently explores this theme. In fact, the very first episode focuses on the power and necessity of binding commitment. Aunt Bea is introduced, returning to Andy's home to help raise Opie and keep house for the busy sheriff. Opie is ambivalent; Aunt Bea neither can put a worm on fishing pole hook nor bat a baseball, signs of utter failure as a person in a little boy's world. However, Andy has raised his youngin' well. Although appalled by her failures, Opie fears that if she leaves, she will be unable to survive – "she NEEDS us, Pa!" In a later episode, Andy enjoys a budding relationship with the local nurse practitioner. Opie fears he will be replaced by her in Andy's affection. Andy, in a solemn moment, takes Opie on his lap and promises him that as father and son, they are so closely bound by love, Andy can't even begin to tell him everything that it means. In short, they are consecrated, set apart for each other in holy, abiding love.

Consecration Sunday / Christ the King Sunday gives everyone the opportunity to rehearse those consecratory vows and promises that bind us. We hear of Christ's utter commitment to us as Savior and Lord – yes, it sounds a bit like the Queen's 21st birthday address. The day also gives us the opportunity to reflect on our role in the faith community we call Mt. Horeb, itself a part of a global faith community Jesus calls his Church. The familiar offertory prayer we've said for years mentions "...ourselves, our time, and our possessions." Global communities far beyond even the Church have marked their mutual commitment by readily sharing from whatever bounty they can muster – we call it "tithes." Tithes are our starting point, not last resort. Those who readily tithe just know it to be "...how you do things." But consecration also has to do with our time – "...whether it be short or long," but ultimately with our very beings. "For better or worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health," we ARE the Lord's, and that's not limited to a tithe. As Paul remarks in *Romans 14:7-8*, *For we do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* Blest be that tie & those tithes that bind our hearts in Christian love!