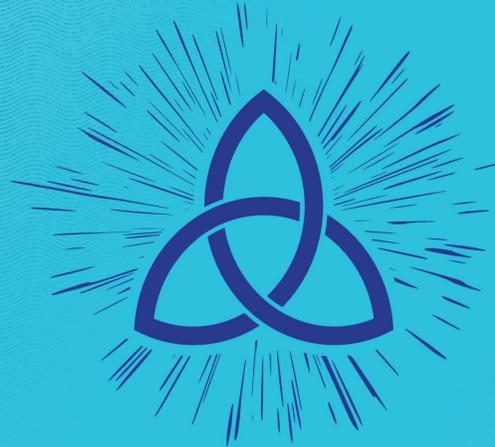


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THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



The Perfect Love Story

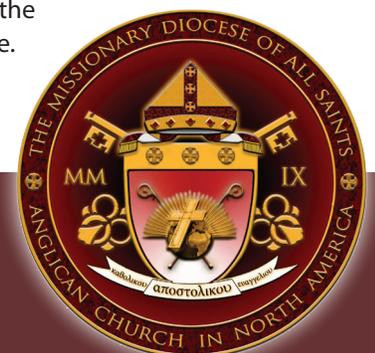
By Bishop Winfield Mott

We are now well launched into what was once more or less universally known as "Trinity Season," the half of the year which is not about the events of Christ's earthly sojourn from Advent through Pentecost. Today, the Trinity has a season in a much smaller number of churches, with the more common term being "Ordinary Time."

The problem with the latter term begins with the word "ordinary." As with many words, it has fallen on hard times in its common usage. "Ordinary" today means something routine, humdrum, uneventful. In some ways, it fits well with the season, which is characterized by its lack of holy days and major holidays. But nothing about a day created by God is ordinary, unless we go back to the older meaning. The term originates from the "order" family, a good solid family of words: orderly, ordinal, ordinance, ordination, ordo, etc. It denotes the orderly unfolding of the church year. It is difficult to know whether it is

worth trying to clarify this older usage, or just to give up and find another word.

If we do, I would suggest a great word: why not call it "Trinity Season?" It is named after the final festival of the festival half of the church year, Trinity Sunday, which summarizes the whole impact of the life of Christ, beginning with when he was sent by the Father, and concluding with the sending of the Holy Spirit to continue with us. The objection no doubt can be made that the term has already been discarded, and this would mean rejecting something trendy to return to the language of the past, which flies in the face of the culture around us. Besides, some worry that the Trinity is too complex a concept, and will confuse the multitudes. But the Trinity is not a thing or a doctrine. He is God. Who better to reign over the season?



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

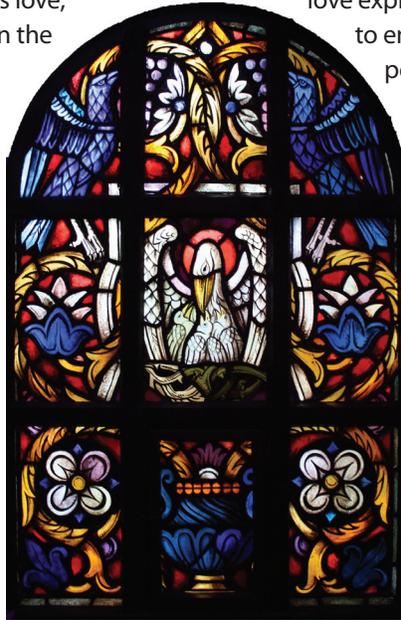
We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

Alas, Trinity Sunday has become the preserve of the theologically obscure. But the message of the day and the season is simple enough: God is indeed more complex than we can possibly imagine, but Scripture, which is true, tells us God is love, and we should both accept and reflect that love. In the Liturgy, the Creed is the theological statement of our Faith. But it is introduced, in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (the Eastern Christian Liturgy), by "Let us love one another that we may with one mind confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Without love, the most profound theology in the world is pointless.

The Trinity is indeed a profound mystery. But in its essence, it is about a love so compelling that the three persons share a completely seamless love, making them in fact, One. The invitation given us to "put on Christ" is to enter into the Body of Christ so that we may share in the perfect love found there, in the Trinitarian unity. To confess Christ can only be done in the context of the love which makes us of "one mind," and without which we are, as St. Paul notes, just meaningless clanging gongs (1 Cor. 13).

Jesus makes this seamless love of the Trinity the model for earthly love, when he says (Matthew 19:5-6) that the husband and wife are no longer two but one. We humans fall short of the seamless love of God, and struggle to find that perfect oneness. But that does not change the model given us.

As well, the same seamless love is put before us as the model for the Christian life in general. Many church people are fond of imposing rules upon each other and even upon the general populace. Their role model, even when they are themselves unaware of this, is the Pharisees, that group of Jesus' contemporaries whose religion consisted of (self-) righteous observance of all the rules and harsh judgement on those who failed to follow. To call the Church back to orthodoxy, it is instead necessary to hear again the invitation, "Let us love one another...."



Of course, "love" is one of those words which can have meanings that are neither lofty nor deep. "I love ice cream," "I love your new outfit" and similar, share the same word as the profound seamless love expressed by the Trinity. Greek finds it necessary to employ three words; eros, filia and agape. It is perhaps telling that only "eros," meaning a mutually satisfying, material and physical emotion, shows up a lot in a modern English version, in the word "erotic," a sexual expression. "Filia," meaning a brotherly or sisterly affection, does appear, although not nearly as much, in words such as "philanthropy," a love of mankind, or "philosophy," a love of wisdom. "Agape," meaning a selfless, giving love which does not require reciprocity to express itself, remains unexpressed in English. If our words mean anything, this is not a good sign.

A long season, focused on how we live our Christian life, especially how we treat others, under the umbrella of the Trinity, with his seamless agape love, could be a good idea. It would definitely not be the ordinary way humans live and interact. The struggle to keep the term "Trinity Season" is probably mostly a losing fight. Nevertheless, regardless of the name given, it still begins with the Festival of the Trinity and we can base the seasonal theme on that even without the name. We have completed half a year of observing and receiving the agape-love of Christ, culminating in the selfless act of the Cross and the bestowing of Resurrection on us. An equal time of lessons applying that love to our own life is an appropriate response.

The most important thing is to always be present with the God who is love, and express our orthodoxy with that agape love. We are confronted with the perfect love story. In eucharistic celebration, in baptismal inclusion, in marital imitation, in human community, even in care for the earth, we are called, in love, to join as best we can in living the love story.

Our Church's Charism

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

As discussed in our last article, the goal set by our last Synod and Clericus is for the Convocation of the West to be more focused as to what our purpose as a Church really is, and how we are to live this purpose every day. We have a working document from which we are trying to start, not only discussion, but also work and movement in the right direction. And we started with our summary statement, namely that "We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition."

From this summary, we then defined three goals that we will

work to achieve:

- *Making disciples of Jesus Christ*
- *Bearing fruit in every good work*
- *And increasing in the knowledge and love of God.*

Making disciples is clear. It goes back to the great commission that was quoted in our last article:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain, which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on

earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

[Mathew 28:16-20]

But, how are we to do this? In order to make disciples of Christ, we must teach others what Jesus taught; we must live the kind of life that Jesus said we are to live; and we must be prepared to talk to others about our faith and what it means. Then, we must send these new disciples out to make more disciples.

Teaching others what Jesus taught can be as simple as conversation and it can be as formal as a sermon. However, many people may feel inadequate to do this. And so, it behooves us in each of our parishes to start Catechesis classes. Bible studies are good and essential, but our faith needs to be pulled into these studies so all are prepared to discuss our faith. Without this focus, Jesus’ words can be muddled and not presented correctly. But, this being said, I must caution everyone as to a problem we have in our American society.

In the United States, over the last fifty to seventy-five years, we have adopted the idea of professionalism, meaning those who are “properly trained” should be doing the work in each field. They are the “specialists” in their fields. This idea has transferred to the ministries. I suspect many parishioners expect the “professional”, i.e. the bishop, priest and deacon, to do the evangelism. They should be the ones “winning souls for Christ” since they were specifically trained in this field. But this is wrong.

If anyone has been exposed to the Gospels, they would realize that the “professionals” were the people Jesus eschewed. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the priests, and the scribes, all the “professional” Jewish religious leaders were the ones that Jesus held up as hypocrites or worse. And whom did Jesus call to be His disciples? Fishermen, tax collectors, and by and large the average person. Therefore, we have to dismiss the notion that only the clergy should be out there, reaching people for Christ. Rather, it should be all of us, without exception. This is why we should all understand our faith; we should all know what we believe; and we should know how to communicate this faith to others.

And one of the ways we communicate our belief in Christ is through our actions. This brings us to our goal of bearing good works. Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is a gift, not of works lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

[Ephesians 2:9-10]

In other words, we are not saved BY good works, BUT we are saved FOR good works. A Christian who does nothing for his fellow man, who does not, in some small way, try to alleviate the suffering of his brothers and sisters is not fulfilling his calling as a Christian. God has a purpose for us. He has a purpose for saving

us. And it is none other than manifesting our Christian faith in our works. Without it, as Saint James tells us, our faith is dead.

The final goal of increasing in the knowledge and love of God, as anyone can see, is essential for the first two goals. How can anyone be a good evangelist without increasing in the knowledge of God? How can anyone truly manifest good works without increasing in the love of God?

We are Anglicans; our religion was based on the very strong belief that we should all read and know our Bibles and read and know our Faith. People died in order to translate the Bible into English so everyone could read and understand it. People died in order to put our services into the vernacular of the people. And the goal in all of this was that everyone, without exception, could grow in the knowledge and love of God and then, become effective disciples. It therefore behooves us all to do so.

As anyone who knows me can testify, I could go on and on about each of these goals, but, in a way, they are self-evident. So, how do we make disciples, how do we bear fruit, and how do we increase in the knowledge and love of God? There are some things which come to mind – Bible Study, Catechesis for all (not just those preparing for Confirmation), and Missions for helping others – but what is also clear is that each of these goals must be specifically geared for each individual parish. What is possible to do in Texas may not work in California or Washington. What one parish with predominantly older people may need may be different from a church with a lot of young families. These programs must be tailored to the parish and to the community in which they live. And this is the responsibility of – all the parishioners, not just the priest in charge. And what is more, if something is not going to work, please state why, but also be prepared to come up with an alternative for the same goal. Shooting down ideas is easy; coming up with alternatives is not.

Next month, I will start breaking down our Focus Statement. God bless.



Analysis of the Seven Churches in Revelation: Sardis

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

The Temple of Artemis outside Sart
(ancient Sardis), Turkey
Photo by Simon Jenkins (Creative Commons)

This is our fifth article discussing the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation. As you will recall, I asked all the churches in the Convocation of the West to use this past Lent as a period of discernment, not just for our individual churches, but also for our Convocations and for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints.

Although our official period of discernment may be over, we still need to pray to God that He will let us know to whom we are to reach and how we are to reach them. Additionally, we need to continue to pray to God to let us know what we are to do so we can continue to be a Diocese that is a beacon of faith and hope and a light to the world. And while we pray for discernment, we need to remember:

*Unless the Lord builds the house,**

Their labor is in vain who build it.

*Unless the Lord keeps the city,**

The watchman keeps vigil in vain.

[Psalm 127:1-2; BCP 2019 page 444]

In an effort to help us in our prayers to rightly see what we must do, we now continue our analysis with the fourth of the Seven Churches –Sardis:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." [Revelation 3:1-6]

As you may recall, with our last church, Thyatira, we moved inland. Sardis is also inland. It is thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. But, unlike the other churches, in order to understand the message to Sardis, it is important to know its history. Sardis was the capital of the kingdom of Lydia and one of the oldest and most important cities in Asia Minor. It was built on an elevated plateau, which rises sharply above the Hermus Valley. On all but one side, the plateau is like an escarpment with sheer cliffs that are smooth and impossible to scale. On the southern side, there is a very difficult path to the city.

As the town grew in prosperity and numbers, the high plateau became too small, and a lower city was built. The old city became their acropolis. Because it was really a double city, it soon was called by its plural form, *Sardis*.

The town prospered, in part, because of its manufacturing of carpets. Its last prince, Croesus was considered the wealthiest man in the world. As a result, there were neighbors who sought to invade this city. And the irony was that two powers were able to take this city. In both situations, because the city was considered impenetrable, the invaders were able to succeed because of the city's complacency.

In 549 B.C., the Median soldiers of Cyrus scaled the parapet and captured the city for Persia. Then in 218 B.C., Antiochus the Great captured the city because a Cretan slipped over the wall while the sentries were not paying attention. In both cases, the invaders succeeded because the people, and especially the guards, felt safe. Finally, the city of Sardis was destroyed by an earthquake during the reign of Tiberius.

Now, let us turn to our passage:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.

It is clear that this is Christ speaking again. The seven stars, according to Eastern Orthodox scholars, may be the seven angels that guide these seven churches. These scholars also hold that

the seven Spirits of God is either an expression of the fullness of God's power present in the Church or else, it may be an illusion to the seven-fold operation of the Spirit of God contained in Isaiah 11:2:

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

For some protestant scholars, the reference to the seven Spirits of God alludes to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. But, no matter to what this passage alludes, the important thing is that it is Christ again speaking to His Church.

"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

This is a terribly frightening image for anyone who is the shepherd of a church. Christ knows their works and they are "dead." What happened to this church? It did not fall into heresy, for Christ would name it like he did with the two churches that followed the Nicolaitans. They did not fall into immorality because, again, Christ would have named that as he did with the church in Thyatira. No, they fell into death! Their faith, their religion has become moribund. What a terrible image. And how ironic.

The patron goddess of Sardis was Cybele, the nature goddess associated with the moon. She was also believed to be able to bring back to life the dead. Well, according to Christ, she is pretty powerless. His church is dead.

T.S. Eliot wrote in his great epic poem, "The Wasteland" these powerful words:

*"This is the way the world ends,
Not with a bang but a whimper."*

This is how the church in Sardis died. No one, not even its own parishioners, noticed the death. Rigor mortis had set in, and there appeared to be no help. This is about what any pastor worth his salt is constantly worried. Has his church become dead? Has ours?

Many people attend church every week, but never really come alive in the faith. They think they are good Christians, but nothing in their life changed because of their faith. They may

donate some money, they may donate some time, but really there is neither love nor understanding of these acts of charity. This is what I imagine the Church in Sardis to be like. People come to church Sunday after Sunday, but nothing in their life has changed. And for this reason, their faith is dead. It has no real meaning, it has no real purpose, and it has no real power.

"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."

For the citizens of Sardis, the command "be watchful" has a powerful connotation. After all, it was complacency that caused their city to fall twice – and it is complacency that is causing the church in Sardis to die. But, there is an element of hope.

There are still good qualities that have not died – yet. The parishioners of Sardis need to strengthen these things and realize that what they have done in the past was not acceptable to God. They need to recapture their faith. They need to "remember" their faith. They need to remember why they became a Christian. They need to "hold fast." They need to hold fast to those reasons why they became a Christian in the first place. And they need to "repent."

As I have said before, Christianity is a faith of "right" or "correct" intention. If we do that which is correct with the wrong attitude,

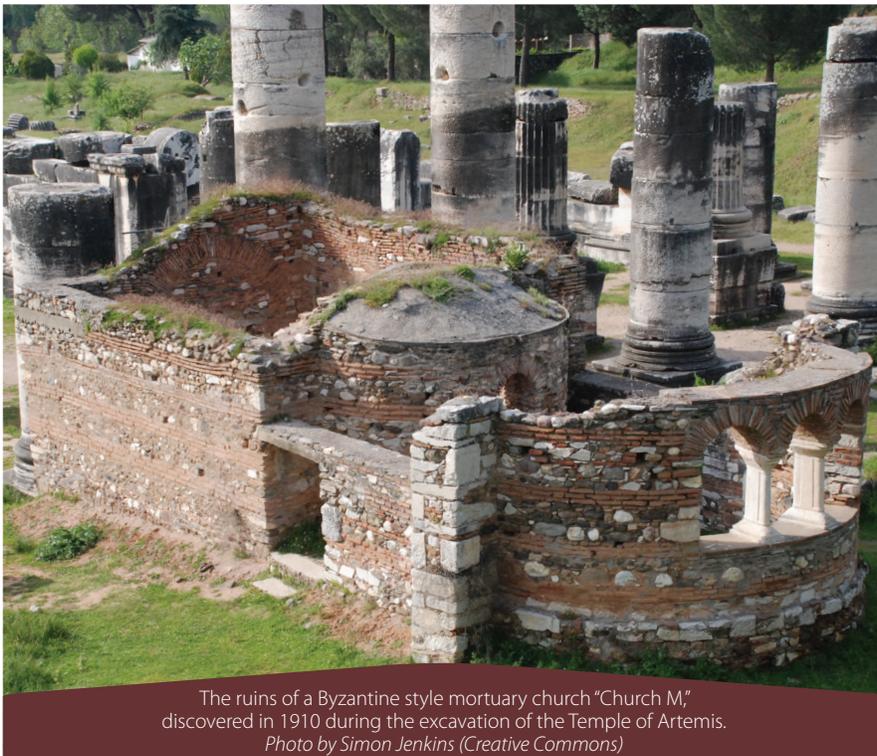
like the Pharisees, the work will be unacceptable. But, if we do the smallest thing with a proper Christian attitude, it will be as pleasing to God as if it were the greatest act ever done. The Church in Sardis may be doing things they should, but their attitude is greatly lacking. And for that reason, their works are considered dead.

So, the word for us all is "Wake Up!" We need to wake up before our faith dies. We need to wake up before our works become hollow. We need to be constantly watchful, and Christ continues with this command:

"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

Clearly, this is an illusion to Matthew 24:43 and Luke 12:39:

[Jesus said,] "And this know, that if the good man of the house had



The ruins of a Byzantine style mortuary church "Church M," discovered in 1910 during the excavation of the Temple of Artemis. Photo by Simon Jenkins (Creative Commons)

known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” [St. Luke 12:39-40]

Be watchful – wake up!

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

This passage starts with the allusion to the white garments said to be worn both by angels and the saints in light. It is spoken of again in Revelation [4:4; 6:11; 7:9; and 19:14], and constantly references both the purity and the victory of which the prophet Daniel wrote in Chapter 11, verse 35 and Chapter 12, verse 10. This is also an allusion to the early church. In the early church, white robes were used to clothe the newly baptized. This is why we call Pentecost “Whitsunday.” It referenced the white robes worn on this day when catechumens were baptized into the church.

However, in Sardis, some have soiled their white robes. Only a few, whose names Christ knows, are undefiled by what has happened in this church. But Christ also promises that those who come back will be clothed again in “white raiment.” Again, this shows the mercy of Christ. He wants everyone to be saved; yet He is not willing to force anyone not willing to be saved. It is up to each and every one of us to choose Christ, to choose to be saved, to choose to be “clothed” in white raiment.

But now we come to the part of this passage that many Protestants find difficult to digest.

“I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

Many Protestant faiths believe that once saved, always saved. They will point to the Gospel of St. John, Chapter 10, verses 27-29, for support for this belief:

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, **neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.** My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”*

However, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, as best as I can deduce, believe that salvation is a combination of justification and sanctification. Justification means faith in Christ, but sanctification is a process whereby we are growing in our Christianity, faith, and holiness. In this sense, the Roman Catholic, and I believe, the Eastern Orthodox, believe that salvation can be lost. And our Scripture passage from Revelation seems to support this contention. Now, as for the Anglicans, we basically support the Protestant notion, but accepted some Catholic beliefs during the Oxford Movement in the 1800s. In other words, once again, we are straddling the fence.

I believe, however, that much of the difficulty between these two theological beliefs comes from where they speak. If we are looking at this from our human point of view, then faith can be lost. If we are looking at it from God’s, then what Christ says in the Gospel of Saint John is also correct. The difference is that we exist IN time; God exists OUT SIDE of time. In other words, for us, it is a process because time affects us. We may stay within the faith, or we may eventually leave. But for God, where everything has already happened, the conversion is permanent.

However, whenever I try to think of events outside of time, I get a headache. For those of you who have a more Protestant sensibility, I would ask you to look at Dr. John Walvoord’s book, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, which gives a good explanation of this passage:

“Some have indicated that there is no explicit statement here that anybody will have his name blotted out, but rather the promise that his name will not be blotted out because of his faith in Christ. The implication, however, is that such is a possibility. On the basis of this some have considered the book of life not as the roll of those who are saved but rather a list of those for whom Christ died, that is, all humanity who have possessed physical life. As they come to maturity and are faced with the responsibility of accepting or rejecting Christ, their names are blotted out if they fail to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour; whereas those who do accept Christ as Saviour are confirmed in their position in the book of life, and their names are confessed before the Father and the heavenly angels.”

Again, this attempts, like the Roman Catholic Church, to explain the process WITHIN time where there may be no need to do so. However, this explanation may give comfort to some.

The real point must be that those who remain faithful have nothing to fear – they WILL receive their eternal reward. But for those who do not, they will be blotted out of the Book of Eternal Life. For those who remain faithful, the message is one of hope. For those whose faith is dead, the message is a warning and an attempt by Christ to bring His lost sheep back into the fold.

For some reason, the message to Sardis resonates with me. Is our faith dead? Is this why the Holy Spirit asked us to not worry about reaching out, but rather that we need to build up our faith first? Do we feel so safe that we have grown complacent in our faith? And are we looking at growing our church, not as an act of evangelism, but rather like some sort of business that we wish to grow? I do not know the answer to these questions, but I ask everyone to pray on this message. And with the Holy Spirit’s help, we can deduce if this message to Sardis really applies to us in the Convocation of the West.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Amen.