

Sermon for Morning Prayer Easter Sunday

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, Called Exodus.ⁱⁱ

“And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

“And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’s passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Chapter of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. ... Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

One of the great benefits of Holy Week, for those who attend its many services, is the way it first reiterates and then weaves together two great themes. First, during the course of the week just past, we have read the complete Passion story as separately recorded by each of the four Evangelists. It is impossible to listen even half-awake to these accounts, with their remarkable factual similarities, without being reminded of the very real and extremely painful nature of the mental trials and physical tortures Our Lord endured for us.

Second, we have heard once again the various prophecies contained in the Jewish Scriptures, which are our Old Testament, which foretold the coming of God's Anointed One and which announced, to those who cared to pay attention, the fate He would suffer. The juxtaposition of those two narrative streams is, of course, no mere happenstance; instead, it was a carefully thought out means of showing us the essential consistency and continuity of God's dealings with humanity.

Development:

One could easily write out a checklist, drawn from those Old Testament books, and then sit down during Holy Week and tick off, point by point, the items that show at once how accurately the prophets of old predicted the coming of the Messiah and that show how Jesus Christ, the craftsman's son from Galilee, fulfills the stipulations those prophets laid down.

So no one who has been even mildly attentive during the Church services of this most important week of our liturgical year can, by this Sunday, be in any doubt about the true nature and mission of the man who some one thousand seventy-three years or so ago was born in Bethlehem, grew to manhood in Nazareth, and died in Jerusalem.

The power of these stories was driven home to me this past Friday, as we walked around the walls of the nave at Christ Church, performing that beautiful act of devotion, the Stations of the Cross. I myself have always found this observance an uplifting one, one in which I gain some small but real sense of unity with Our Lord on His last journey.

This time, however, that feeling was even more vibrant and alive than usual because I was watching my young son Jack as he moved with us from Station to Station. I could see his increasing excitement as, stop by stop, he realized that he recognized what this symbolic pilgrimage meant, relating the customary fourteen events of the Stations to the Gospel lessons he had been taught in parochial school and Sunday school.

As Jack made those connections in his own mind, the Passion story ceased to become just a mythic account of some long-past, and therefore largely irrelevant, happening and became a present, and therefore personal, reality for him. One of the reasons we jaded adults need to have children in church with us is that they so

easily remind us of the wonder and novelty of what God has actually done on our behalf.

It is that sense of present reality that enables the Gospel story to strengthen us and so to sustain us when we are in great trouble or turmoil. Thus one of the greatest sins a Christian can commit is to undermine or weaken someone else's faith in the power and reality of that Gospel.

Tragically, amid all the various unpleasant things that litter the news today, one stands out as being of precisely this tendency. At this moment, we are being inundated with reports that, cumulatively, the news media hope will besmirch the personal reputation of, and so erode peoples' confidence in, the current Roman Catholic Bishop of Rome. At this moment, the focus on these reports is the increasing numbers of cases of child abuse being brought to light in both Germany and Ireland.

We in the United States are already familiar with this overall problem; we have had nearly twenty years of increasing knowledge of it. But it is a much newer realization for people in Europe than it is for us. Also, we here in North America live in a society in which the Roman Catholic Church is much less an institutional part of our culture than it is in either Germany or Ireland, but especially than it is in Ireland. The Church here certainly operated some schools, orphanages, and similar institutions of charity, but public education and philanthropy were never so exclusively in its hands as they were in Eire [**AIR-uh**].

More than forty years ago, I spent a year at university in Dublin and I saw this cultural predominance at first hand. Ireland then was a very tolerant society, with great respect and strong legal protections for even tiny minority faiths such as the Quakers and the Jews, but the universal tone of life there was unquestionably formed and nurtured by the Roman Church.

So when an official commission can publish five volumes detailing the results of its investigations into very widespread abuses and a continuing pattern of cover-ups and disregard on the part of national church leaders there, it is perhaps only to have been expected that, in the grievous disappointment caused by the fall from grace of those who were formerly placed on pedestals, the moulders of public opinion are calling for the resignation or removal of the most senior Archbishops of the Irish hierarchy.

It is tragic beyond all adequate expression that the church which has historically held the allegiance of the overwhelming majority of Irishmen has been so successfully attacked by the forces of evil that it is now threatened with the loss of the respect of many, if not indeed most, of its countrymen. Only Satan can benefit by such a devastating development.

Just by itself, without considering any other aspects of this situation, it is clearly one that “is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”^v I

However, there is a further tragic dimension to this woeful tale. Historically, Ireland has been home to another national church, one that has embraced only a minority of the population but which rejoiced in the proud name of “The Church of Ireland”. This is the Lambeth-affiliated body which, for political and sentimental reasons, has at no time since the Reformation ever succeeded in attaching to it any large proportion of the population of the island. Nevertheless, despite its numerical disadvantage, it has always had a very considerable influence for the same reasons as, in the United States, the Episcopal Church formerly had. That is, the Church of Ireland was always a church with a membership that was predominantly educated, professional, economically comfortable, and therefore politically influential.

The Primates of the Church of Ireland – the Archbishops of Armagh and Dublin – were always national figures whose words were listened to with attention and respect. For example, when I was a student at Trinity College, the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin was a well-loved and much-respected figure while the cantankerous and explosive Roman Archbishop was generally regarded as, at best, a poor joke.

Had that happy situation of public esteem continued, the C of I might today be in a position to step into the sudden and drastic vacancy in Irish national life, that is, to offer some alternative moral leadership to that the Roman hierarchy has at least temporarily forfeited.

Sadly, there is little possibility of that’s ever happening. For the past twenty-three years, the Irish “Anglican” hierarchy has been one of the reservoirs of the Modernist virus that has infected the entire “official” Anglican world. For example, it was precisely the man who was for twenty years Primate of All Ireland, Robin Eames, who crafted the subtly deceptive position papers that paralyzed any

effective response by the Lambeth Communion to the corrosive effects of the purported “ordination” of women.

Conclusion:

So, while for the moment the Irish people have been bereft of trustworthy moral and religious direction by the defalcations of their Roman Catholic leaders, they have simultaneously been denied any effective alternative leadership by the theological and moral apostasy of the traditional Church of Ireland.

This dual tragedy is, indeed, one of those cases that cries out for patient Christian persistence, in the sure and certain hope that God will not leave His people adrift indefinitely. We do not know from whence new leaders will come, or just what form those new leaders’ message will take, but we can be confident that, just as Our Lord rose from the grave to show Himself alive to His followers, so God will resurrect the ancient and mighty Christian institutions of Ireland, the very institutions that converted all of Britain to the Faith.

Until such time as He makes His Will apparent in that country, it is as St. John said: ““Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.””^{vi}

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister
April 4, 2010.

ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Exodus 12: 1-14 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Revelation 14: 1-7, 12-13 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Revelation 14: 12 (RSV).*

^v *Revelation 14: 12 (RSV).*

^{vi} *Revelation 14: 12 (RSV).*