

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Book of Daniel.³

“Belshazzar [**bell-SHAZZ-urr**] the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar [**bell-SHAZZ-urr**], while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

“In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king’s palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew [**SHOW**] me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then came in all the king’s wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then was king Belshazzar [**bell-SHAZZ-urr**] greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished.

“Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and

said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar [**neb- YOU-kad-NEZZ-ur**] thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing [**SHOW-ing**] of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar [**bell-teh-SHAZZ-urr**]: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation. Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

“Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar [**neb- YOU-kad-NEZZ-ur**] thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven

may be able to refrain from fornication at home, they may there be able to avoid covetousness, uncleanness, and silliness, but so long as they stay away from the congregation, they will not be able to “give thanks” in the sense in which St. Paul meant that.

For as St. Paul told the Ephesians, the manner of life that is consistent with the holy calling of God’s people includes going to church, there to offer thanks together with the gathered Christian community, that is, “to make Eucharist”.

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March 11, 2012

¹ The sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass on the Third Sunday in Lent, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 42 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxvi (CIPBC 1963).

³ Daniel 5:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Daniel 6:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Ephesians 4:25—5:21 (KJV).

⁶ Ephesians 5:3-4 (RSV).

⁷ I Corinthians 1:2 (RSV).

⁸ II Corinthians 1:1 (RSV).

⁹ Ephesians 5:4 (RSV).

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any place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours....”⁷

His second letter is addressed similarly: “To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia...”,⁸ and others of his Epistles are addressed similarly as well.

So there you have the bad news. We gather together to call on the Name of our Lord Jesus, so by virtue of that fact, we, just like those old Corinthians, are “saints”. And, being “saints” means we belong to God and are called to live as those should live who are dedicated to God’s service: that is, living without sexual impurity, covetousness, unclean habits, or silliness, to use just the examples that Paul did.

The second theme I would like to unpack for you from our text this morning is the one to which St. Paul alludes when he tells the Ephesians, and therefore us: “Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving.”⁹

So what are we to do with the time we might very well otherwise be devoting to unseemly sexual impurity, covetousness, unclean habits, or silliness? Paul says we are to use that time to *give thanks*. But that translation fails to give the full implication of Paul’s injunction. For the Greek word for “thanks” is *eucharistein*, so the Greek in which Paul originally wrote could quite reasonably be translated to say “but instead let there be the making of the Eucharist”.

In other words, Paul is here telling the Ephesians that instead of wasting their lives on their old heedless ways of pagan living, they should be gathered as the Church, celebrating and offering what we call the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass! And that, folks, is the ultimate answer to those who question why they should go to church rather than to stay lazily at home, praying—at least so they allege—in their own living rooms. They

from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar [**bell-SHAZZ-urr**], hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

“And this is the writing that was written, MENE [**MEE-nigh**], MENE [**MEE-nigh**], TEKEL [**TECK-ull**], UPHARSIN [**you-FARR-sin**]. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE [**MEE-nigh**]; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL [**TECK-ull**]; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES [**PEA-rezz**]; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar [**bell-SHAZZ-urr**], and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

“In that night was Belshazzar [**bell-SHAZZ-urr**] the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius [**duh-RYE-uss**] the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.”

Or,

Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of the Book of Daniel.⁴

“It pleased Darius [**duh-RYE-uss**] to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Da-

niel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

“Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius [*duh-RYE-uss*], live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius [*duh-RYE-uss*] signed the writing and the decree.

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king’s decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with him-

longs to God even though at any given moment, and just like a holy utensil or other object, he or she may not be acting in His service.

If you have any doubt about this distinction, just remember those ancient Christians in the city of Corinth, Greece. Saint Paul wrote them twice in order to admonish them for, and correct them from, some distinctly unsanctified behavior. In fact, the principal occasion for one of his letters was their toleration of some almost unspeakably depraved personal behavior, about as far from what we think of as characterizing a calendar “Saint” as it is possible to get.

But despite Paul’s grievous disappointment at those Corinthians low moral standards, or perhaps precisely because of that disappointment, he chose to approach them by reminding them of their high and holy vocation that they had because they belonged to God.

Now how are things or people dedicated to God so that they belongs to Him? Traditionally, that is done through special prayers over them, usually coupled with some special gestures that are designed to symbolize the intentions of those making this dedication. Think for a moment of our traditional baptismal service: that consists of prayers for the one being baptized, together with the unmistakable gesture of dipping him or her in water, or pouring water over him or her, declaring all the while that the intended result is to make him or her a child of God. This, of course, is what had already happened to the Corinthians when they joined the church: they were dedicated to God’s service in their baptisms, that is, they were made holy by being dedicated to Him.

The way Paul reminded the Corinthians of this holy calling, of their belonging to God, was through the way he addressed his letters to them. Thus his first letter wrote that it was “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in

that is appointed to be read this morning contains two points from this ethical discourse that I would like to unpack for you, both of which relate to our Lenten theme of penitence and reflection upon the requirements of the Christian life.

The first such theme is the one in which St. Paul tells the Ephesians, and therefore also tells us, that sexual impurity, covetousness, unclean habits, and silliness are not consistent with our Christian calling. And notice how he describes that calling: he says these things are not “fitting among saints”.

In other words, St. Paul has no doubt whatever that we are called to be “saints”. So what does he mean by this word? Does he think each of us is destined to end up with his or her own special day of remembrance in the Church’s calendar?

Not necessarily. For the term “saint” applies more broadly than just to those heroes of the Faith who are remembered with their own special feast days. “Saint”, after all, is merely a word we have borrowed into English from French and that means “holy”. A “saint” is a “holy one”.

But to say that someone is “holy” can be to say at least two separate, and not always mutually-applicable things. In its narrowest meaning, it means that some one has attained a state of sanctified life in which he or she is an example to the rest of us. This is the sense in which we use “Saint”, with a capital “S”, as a title for those under whose patronage we entrust our church congregations and religious institutions and whose lives, and most often deaths, we celebrate by dedicating specific calendar days to that purpose.

However, in its broadest meaning, “holy” simply means that some one, or some thing, has been dedicated to a holy purpose and that holy purpose is always God’s service. So something may be “holy” because it belongs to God even though at any given moment it may not be being used for His service. In the same way, a person may be “holy” because he or she be-

self, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

“Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

“And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

“Then king Darius [*duh*-RYE-uss] wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion

shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius [duh-RYE-uss], and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁵

“... Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye

were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprovèd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith [SETH], Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[F]ornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians begins with three Chapters of doctrinal teachings. Then those three Chapters are followed by three more that St. Paul devotes to an exposition of the ethical implications of the doctrinal teachings with which he filled the first three Chapters. The selection from that Epistle