

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the First Book of Samuel.³

“And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man’s hand. And he said unto them, The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness.

“And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the LORD, then the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they forgot the LORD their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera [**SISS-urr-uh**], captain of the host of Hazor [**HAY-zoar**], and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the LORD, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD, and have served Baalim [**BAY-uh-limb**] and Ashtaroth

[ASH-tuh-rahth]: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the LORD sent Jerubbaal **[dgerr-uh-BAY-ull]**, and Bedan **[BEE-dann]**, and Jephthah **[JEFF-thuh]**, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. And when ye saw that Nahash **[NAY-hash]** the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the LORD hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.

“Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the LORD will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the LORD; and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king.

“And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, 2013.

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 39 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (CIPBC 1963).

³ I Samuel 12:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Job 39:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Romans 12:1-end (KJV).

⁶ Romans 12:2, 4-5 (RSV).

⁷ This entire initial exposition is borrowed from *F. Davidson & Ralph P. Martin, Romans*, in HERBERT G. MAY & BRUCE M. METZGER, eds., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 1039-1040 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁸ Romans 12:5 (RSV).

⁹ Ephesians 4:4-6 (RSV).

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:12 (RSV).

¹¹ Ephesians 4:16 (RSV).

¹² Colossians 1:18a (RSV).

¹³ James 2:26 (RSV).

¹⁴ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 81 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁵ Priest-in-Charge, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS. Honorary Canon, The Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-ninth Chapter of the Book of Job.⁴

“Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve? Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows. Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them. Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing. Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn? Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust, And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not her's: her labour is in vain without fear; Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider. Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper?

the glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage: neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet. He saith [SETH] among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁵

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait

and made Himself known to us, for a very specific purpose. He did not come so that we could *feel* something, or so that we could *enjoy* something; He came so that we could *become* something and could *do* something.

Conclusion:

So, to continue my example, if I have truly experienced this Christian alteration, then instead of its being a completely inward and personal matter, it will be manifested outwardly in my manner of life with my fellow men and women. Most especially, it will be seen in my manner of life with those of my fellow men and women who have, along with me, accepted the graces God has offered us, declared our mutual Faith in Him, and have assembled ourselves together to adore Him and to offer Him what our Book of Common Prayer calls “the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”¹⁴

That “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” to which we refer in the Canon of Consecration is, quite literally, “making Eucharist”, for “Eucharist” is just the Greek word for “thanksgiving”. From the very first days of the Church, when those who were present with Our Lord at the Last Supper gathered to do what He had instructed them when He told them, “Do this in remembrance of me”, this “Great Thanksgiving” has been the act of the whole Christian congregation, joining together to re-present before God the Father the one Sacrifice of His Son once offered.

And thus it is, dearly beloved, that celebrating the Eucharist—this thing that Christ Himself ordered us to do in memory of Him—is something one simply cannot do alone, by oneself, in one’s own living room, when no other member of the Christian community is present.

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has an inherent organic unity. In such a “body”, each limb and each organ plays its own unique rôle in contributing to the health and well-being of the whole.

Thus Paul implies both of these senses simultaneously when he writes the Ephesians: “There is *one body* and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.”⁹ And, a bit later, he writes: “[E]quip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up *the body of Christ*...”¹⁰ And then again: “[*T*he *whole body*, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.”¹¹

Similarly, he writes to the Colossians about how Our Lord constituted this metaphorical “body”, this “Assembly”, this “Gathering”, this “Church”: “He [Jesus Christ] is the head of *the body, the church*...”¹²

But Paul was not the only Apostle who saw these connections. For St. James, too, wrote in these same terms when he said: “[A]s *the body* apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.”¹³

Thus, for one example, if I have truly converted from paganism to Christianity, if I have truly accepted Christ’s gift to me of Himself so that I can transcend the limitations of my natural human self so as to become greater than that natural self, that is, to be transformed into a *supernatural* self, then this alteration will not be a wholly selfish, private change.

This theme recurs throughout the Church year, but is especially the subject of, for example, the Epiphany Season. God did not manifest Himself to the nations merely for our private delectation or solitary contemplation. He came to us,

on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth [**SHOW-eth**] mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith [**SETH**] the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ... For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today's Second Lesson is the opening of a long discourse—slightly more than three chapters, in fact—in which Paul explains to the Romans what Christianity means in practice.⁷ The overall theme is that while true conversion to the new Faith requires both the acceptance of the facts of Our Lord's mission to humanity and one's personal declaration of allegiance to Him, those are the personal and internal dimensions of such a conversion.

Theme:

Equally as important as our faith commitments, however, are the external and social dimensions of that conversion. For Christianity is not merely a set of propositions to which individuals may—or may not—give intellectual assent, it is a communal endeavor in which the people of the Assembly—or as the Greeks called it, the *Ekklesia*, from which we get our English term the Church—these people deliberately choose to associate themselves together in a common life. They do so both for mutual support and assistance and to give a united witness to those around them of the changes of life they have experienced as a result of their Christian conversions.

Development:

In this connection, please note that when I read you in my text, “be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”, the English word “prove” has changed its meaning over the years. Today, it means “to establish by means of evidence” where it formerly meant “to put to the test”. Thus all firearms get their final safety tests at a “proof house” and, when they pass, are stamped with a “proof mark”; so, too, the common proverb, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”. When we eat pudding, we are not

establishing the truth of any proposition; we are putting the pudding to the test.

In other words, by renewing our minds, St. Paul says, we may test what is the will of God for us and, especially, we may test what, in our deportment and outward manner of life, conforms to that will.

It is significant that the very name of the new Christian community should be “the Assembly” or “the Gathering”. This highly indicative name provides, among other things, one of the fundamental answers to those who say silly things like, “I don't need to go to church; I can pray to God just as well at home in my living room.” Well, at home in one's living room one can pursue one's personal devotions, and every true Christian should certainly have a strong and lively personal prayer life. However, it is impossible to be a vibrant, contributing member of a community while at the same time staying away from the places where the other people of that community gather.

That necessity for us to be vibrant, contributing members of a community is why Paul tells the Romans, and so tells us, “[W]e, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”⁸

Throughout Paul's letters to his new churches, he uses the word “body” in two, related but different, senses. One is that which we have already discussed: a “body” of people is a group of people, but not a random group. It is made up of people who have some organic relationship among themselves; they have come together for some common purpose. Thus they are not a chance collection or a mob but an intentional community, a society.

Then Paul takes that same word and applies it metaphorically in another one of its senses: a “body”, like a person's body or an animal's body, is a physical structure which