

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The First Evensong of St. Simon and St. Jude
(October 27)

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.²

“... Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the second Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.³

“... Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And [Christ] came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”⁴

Here, the King James text is not as clear as one might hope. Therefore, for once, I am going to repeat the sermon text in a more modern translation: “[Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”⁵

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

At first, it may seem slightly odd that on this Red Letter feast which celebrates two of our Lord's Apostles, neither of the appointed readings mentions either one of them by name. Instead, the Old Testament lesson, from Isaiah, deals with the role and importance of sound doctrine or true teaching, while the New Testament lesson, from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, deals with Christ's redemptive work among a lost and confused human race.

On second thoughts, however, the relevance of these themes becomes more apparent. Our Lord sent His Apostles out into the world to preach to and teach all nations,⁶ so what is an Apostle if not a teacher? And of what use is any teaching if it be not sound and reliable because it is true? And our Lord told his Apostles that their evangelism and teaching should make disciples of all who heard them,⁷ that is, should convert them to Christ, which clearly implies that the ultimate purpose of the Apostolate is to assist our Lord in His work of salvation among mankind.

Theme:

Mankind's single greatest problem is that, in the condition in which we are born into this world, we are destined to separate ourselves from God. As the ninth Article of Religion reminds us: "[M]an is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit..."⁸

The only reasonable object for a human being to set for his life is to heal that separation and thereby to bring himself closer to God. That, however, we cannot do by our own unaided efforts. In His Mercy, however, God has pro-

vided the way for us and although we can never actually deserve to live in fellowship with Him, He will treat us as though we do deserve to do so. We call this gracious acceptance of our unworthy selves by the name, “Justification”.

This Justification, which we do not and cannot earn, but can only receive as a gift, is the gift Jesus Christ died to bring to us. As the eleventh Article of Religion teaches us: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings.”⁹ This is the sort of basic but essential Christian doctrine of which we hear all too little these days; perhaps that is because we find it uncomfortable to be reminded that we are not, in fact, “all right” as we are but very much to the contrary, as the Articles of Religion explain, we are “all wrong” as we are now.

Development:

- 1. In the state of Nature, that is, before we know Christ, we are outside God’s saving Covenant that He made with His people. In other words, until we are incorporated into the People of God, we stand outside the Covenant of Grace and have no assurance of Salvation.**

The ancient Jews were wise and observant people so it is no surprise that they easily discerned the fact that human beings just naturally seem to behave in self-destructive as well as anti-social ways. Along with these dysfunctional behaviors, men and women always tend to do the very things that a good and loving God would have us refrain from doing and to fail to do those very things that God would have us do.

This inescapable fact is elegantly summed up in the incomparable language of the General Confession that forms part of the Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer: “We

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October 28, 2008.

¹ *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlvi (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

² Isaiah 28:9-16 (KJV).

³ Ephesians 2:11-22 (KJV).

⁴ Ephesians 2:17-18 (KJV).

⁵ Ephesians 2:17-18 (NIV).

⁶ St. Matthew 28:19-20a.

⁷ St. Matthew 28:19.

⁸ *Article IX, Of Original or Birth-Sin*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 702 (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

⁹ *Article XI, Of the Justification of Men*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 702 (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

¹⁰ A General Confession, *The Order for Daily Morning Prayer*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 4 (Anglican Church of Canada 1962) and A General Confession, *The Order for Daily Evening Prayer*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 19 (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

¹¹ Genesis 3:1-24.

¹² Ephesians 2:11-12 (NIV).

¹³ Ephesians 1:22b-23 (KJV).

¹⁴ Colossians 1:24 (KJV).

¹⁵ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 82 (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

¹⁶ St. John 14:6.

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:13-16 (NIV).

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:17-18 (NIV).

¹⁹ St. Matthew 28:18-20; St. Mark 16:15-16.

²⁰ St. Mark 16:16; St. John 20:31.

²¹ St. Mark 16:16 (KJV).

ble source. There can be no source more reliable than God Himself and he said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”²¹

Conclusion:

There is, of course, a third problem with this fact that salvation comes only through our response to Christ in faith. That is that, even after we have heard His Good News, even after we have responded to that by believing in it, even after we have gone through the formalities of joining His Church by professing our faith in Him and being baptized into Him, even after all that, our journey is not over.

Many of our Protestant brethren, especially those who identify themselves as “Evangelicals”, and all those who belong to the Calvinist theological tradition, tend to believe that once that first step is taken, once someone has openly professed his faith in Christ, the job of salvation is done. We, as Catholics, know better. Salvation is not a moment that can be written down on a card and carried in our wallets; it is a way of life. Even after we have been received into the Faith, we must still actively and continuously work and struggle to live up to that vocation, to live as Christians.

Each day, each of us must examine his or her conscience, must review the thoughts and actions of the day before and of the current day up until this moment of reflection, and ask himself or herself, “Have I thought and acted as a Christian is supposed to do? Have I been motivated by love, both for Our Lord and for His other people, and not by self-love? Has anything I have thought or done been the product of either Pride, of Anger, of Envy, of Covetousness, of Gluttony, of Lust, or of Sloth?”

And if I can answers any part of that last question with a “No”, then I know I am lying to myself.

have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us.”¹⁰ “Health” here means “wholeness” and “wholeness” requires that we be in good standing with God.

Those ancient Jews explained this clearly observable phenomenon in the terms of Adam and Eve’s Fall from an original state of Grace that is set forth in Genesis,¹¹ where it is visualized as an act of disobedience to God that leads to a negative progression from innocence to guilty knowledge.

However one choses to explain this fact, it is something with which we are all familiar. The English apologist, G. K. Chesterton, said that Original Sin is the only Christian doctrine that is subject to empirical verification: one need only look around one to see it in operation. The first step in God’s plan to heal this wound in our natures was the Covenant of the Law, the story of which is the major theme of the Old Testament. However, a Covenant that was based on membership of one particular tribal people, marked out from the surrounding tribes by the physical mark of male circumcision, naturally gave rise to attitudes of exclusivism and triumphalist self-exaltation on the part of those who happened to have been born into that Covenant people, as St. Paul reminds the Ephesians – all of whom were born strangers to the Israelite nation of that old Covenant in today’s Second Lesson:

“Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at the time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.”¹²

To bring mankind true hope of healing, of wholeness, of the possibility of a right relationship with God, the Covenant based on biological birth into a particular tribe, marked by a physical sign such as circumcision, had to be replaced with a Covenant based on God's promise to mankind and man's response to that promise in faith, marked by a spiritual sign which, for us, is Baptism.

2. When we are incorporated into Christ, He by His Grace heals our separation from God and brings us into the Covenant of Grace, thus making possible our salvation.

In two places, St. Paul uses the metaphor of a living body to explain what happens when we put on Christ by accepting Him in faith and thereby becoming members of His Church. He refers to "the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all"¹³ and, again, to "his body's sake, which is the church".¹⁴

Physical bodies grow incrementally and in a predetermined way from one cell, through an almost infinite number of cellular divisions, into the complete organism. In contrast, the Sacramental body which is the Church grows by the continuous addition of individuals, one person at a time, not in a predetermined or genetically-controlled fashion but as the result of an infinitude of individual choices in faith. This is made possible by our Lord's "[own] oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world..."¹⁵ a fact of which we remind ourselves each Sunday in the Canon of Consecration at the Eucharist.

3. Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,¹⁶ is the means whereby we may be reconciled to God the Father.

As St. Paul put this reconciling work of Christ to the Ephesians:

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."¹⁷

Also: "[Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."¹⁸

However, there is a problem with this solution that God offers us. First, we must know that it exists. This is the mission for which the Apostles, such as Saints Simon and Jude, were commissioned: to go out and preach the Good News that Christ brought to mankind.¹⁹ Second, we must respond to that Good News by accepting it, believing it, and acting upon it, for those who do not believe will not be saved.²⁰

That salvation is limited to those who do something about it is not a popular idea in today's world; we much prefer to believe that we do not need to do anything because we are already pretty good people. However, popularity or comfortableness is not a reliable test for Truth. Truth is not determined by majority vote; if it were, the majority of Germany's Jews, who believed their country was too civilized to murder them, would have survived World War II.

The test for Truth is not whether it is popular or whether it is widely-held, it is whether it comes from a relia-