

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the second Chapter of Joel.⁴

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

The command of Jesus I just quoted from today’s Second Lesson is likely the most difficult one for us, as Christians, to obey. It is difficult for us to allow the Holy Ghost to bring us into obedience with this command and the instructions He gives in this entire Lesson from the Sermon on the Mount.

Our birth nature just isn’t inclined this way. By nature we are self-centered. Added to our nature is the attitude of society which says we *must* put our own temporal needs first. Jesus reverses this order. He commands us to seek Him, seek His kingdom and His righteousness *first*, and *then* tend to our temporal needs.

Jesus is *not* saying that we should not take any thought to anything else but His kingdom and His righteousness. Such a person would be a fool! What He is saying is we need to order things properly.

We need to seek Him, His kingdom and His righteousness *first, foremost, before, above and beyond any other thing*, and *then* give thought to other things, the temporal things we need for life in this world. Oswald Chambers states this much better than I do. He wrote: “*Jesus taught that a disciple has to make his relationship to God the dominating concentration of his life, and to be carefully careless about everything else in comparison to that.*”

The keys to obeying our Lord’s teaching here are, first, to make our relationship to God the *dominating concentration*, the main concern, of our lives, and then, second, to be *carefully careless*, aware but not anxious, about everything else. If we gain and keep that order in our lives we will be obedient to our Lord’s command, which will lead us to a life of holiness and peace. Of course this command is counter-cultural, revolutionary even!

Jesus commands us to “*take no thought*”. In other words, *have no anxiety about, don’t be troubled by, put forth no time or effort to care about* our legitimate needs for food, drink and clothes. We are to “*Take no thought*” for any of them, *until* we are secured in the kingdom and righteousness of God. When we keep this order, those secondary needs will be added unto us. God will provide. When we learn to obey this command, and it is possible and expected that we learn and obey it, a whole new way of life is opened to us.

Chambers called it being “*carefully careless*” about everything else. When we are fixated on the kingdom and righteousness of God first, the Holy Ghost teaches us that we do not need to worry about anything else. Our needs for personal property and possessions (food, drink, clothes) become matters of indifference. We learn to hold loosely to all those things. And as we hold loosely to them, we come to trust God will add them unto us as He sees we have the need.

We will come to know in our spirits what St. Paul writes to the Philippians:⁷ “*I know how to be abased (have nothing), and I know how to abound (have all I need): every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*”

Such knowledge will bring us great peace. It will bring us peace because we will be living according to the rule of Christ's kingdom and in His righteousness, the two things that should be the dominating concentrations of our lives! Living in Christ, by Christ, and for Christ and His kingdom will become our life's "obsession." Not in some obnoxious way! Quietly, but really. Beginning in our souls and working its way into our desires, actions and words, the kingdom of God and His righteousness will be the first thing we seek and live for.

As we do, our spirits and minds will be freed to "*take no thought*" for those secondary things. When we have them, great. When we don't, okay, we don't. God knows, and so we will wait for Him to provide. Easier said than done? Not really. Not if we live by grace through faith unto good works, seeking the kingdom and righteousness of our Lord Jesus.

As we use the grace the Holy Ghost provides us *today*, right now, at this very moment, we will be enabled to do the very thing Jesus commands us to do in this Gospel lesson. No special preparation is needed. As the *Nike* ad. says, "*Just do it.*" We need only to take hold of the grace we have right now from our Baptism, our Confirmation, our regular reception of the Holy Eucharist, our time spent in prayer, and put it to use. Now.

Later in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount He says, "*Ask, seek, and knock.*"⁸ When we do we will "... *receive and find,*" and what is now closed to us will be "*opened*". That verse is often limited to teaching people to ask, seek and knock for material things; the very things for which Jesus tells us to "*take no thought*"! That is a misapplication!

What we need to be asking, seeking and knocking for is to use the grace we have at our disposal *right now, this* moment, to use it to make the kingdom and righteousness of God the dominating concentration of our lives. It most definitely can be done. God's grace is sufficient.

Jesus never asks or commands us to do anything that He does not make us capable of doing. Therefore, while making our dominating concentrations the kingdom and righteousness of God may *seem* difficult, or even "impossible," it is not.

The grace we need to set and keep the order of our lives obedient to Jesus is already ours. All we need to do is put it to use.

May we do so, to the glory of His Name, the building of His kingdom, and the advancement of His righteousness in our lives and in His Church. *Amen.*

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September 16, 2012

¹ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² *This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.*

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ *Joel 2:21-27 (KJV).*

⁵ *St. Matthew 6:24-34 (KJV).*

⁶ *St. Matthew 6:33 (KJV).*

⁷ *Philippians 4:12 (KJV).*

⁸ *St. Matthew 7:7-8 (KJV).*

⁹ *Rector, St. Thomas of Canterbury Anglican Catholic Church, Roanoke, Virginia.*