

# SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER<sup>i</sup>

## THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

### Lessons: <sup>ii</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Book of Daniel. <sup>iii</sup>

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

“... But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians. <sup>iv</sup>

“... But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so

shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the First Lesson: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”<sup>v</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Introduction:**

Over the last few weeks, some of you may have heard or read references to the prediction of a self-described “Bible teacher”, the highly idiosyncratic<sup>vi</sup> and heterodox “Brother Harold” Camping, who recently announced via broadcasts on his “Family Radio” network and on highway billboards that the Rapture would occur yesterday, May 21, 2011<sup>vii</sup>.

Of course, the fact that we are sitting here this morning, listening to this sermon suggests that “Brother Harold” overlooked St. Matthew, Chapter 25, Verse 13: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh” and also St. Mark, Chapter 13, Verse 32: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” Nevertheless, despite all of his oddities, he has had the self-confidence to address something we all tend to find it more comfortable to pass over in silence, that is, the topic of the eventual end of all things.

### **Theme:**

Today’s Lessons deal forthrightly with this profound issue, which should always be in the forefront of every Christian’s consciousness. One of the most important phases of human life is, paradoxically, its end.

One customary way the Church has categorized this is under the four topics of Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. As a group, these are known in Doctrinal Theology and in Homiletics as The Four Last Things. For obvious reasons, they are the traditional mainstays of funeral sermons, but preachers are urged to bring them to their flocks' attention more often than just at funerals.

### **Development:**

There are few things in life that matter more than the way we leave it and where we go from there. Between today's two Lessons, we are presented with clear Scriptural evidence of the reality and inescapability of these "end of life" and "after life" issues. They are set out as three or four related, in fact sequential, events: Our Lord's Coming in Glory (often referred to as His "Second Coming"<sup>viii</sup>); the Resurrection of the Dead; and, by implication, Our Lord's Judgment on us, which will be followed for each of us by an eternity in either heaven or hell.

#### **A. The "Second Coming".**

In the Second Lesson, St. Paul declares to the Thessalonians, and therefore to us, that Our Lord's next Coming will in fact take place: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God...."<sup>ix</sup> While reasonable Christians may hold different opinions about the audio-visual effects that will accompany Our Lord's arrival, in the face of this bald declaration, none of us can, or should, attempt to deny His Coming by interpreting this Verse, and others like it, as merely symbolic or metaphorical images.

As we recite in every Mass in which we say or sing the Nicene Creed, "And he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead."<sup>x</sup>

#### **B. The Resurrection and, implicitly, the Judgement.**

When Our Lord does thus come in Glory, all the dead will rise from their graves, just as He Himself did on the first Easter Day, and those dead will be made whole persons again by being reunited with

their physical bodies. As St. Paul told the Thessalonians, “[A]nd the dead in Christ shall rise ...”,<sup>xi</sup> which reflects what Daniel had predicted in Old Testament times: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake....”<sup>xii</sup>

This is what we attest to each time we recite the Nicene Creed: “And I look for the Resurrection of the dead....”<sup>xiii</sup> But, as we also know from that same Creed, our personal bodily resurrections will be accompanied by our personal judgements: “And he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead....”<sup>xiv</sup>

### **C. Heaven and Hell.**

That judgement will determine where each of us spends eternity. As Daniel foretold, “[M]any ... shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”<sup>xv</sup> Thus St. Paul taught the Thessalonians: “[A]nd so shall we ever be with the Lord.”<sup>xvi</sup>

Those Scriptural “everlastings” and “evers” leave no question that our fates, as decided by Christ in judgment, will be forever. Thus we say in the Creed: “Whose kingdom shall have no end” and “And I look for ... the Life of the world to come.”<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

At this moment, as we sit here, the middle third of the United States is experiencing massive flooding on the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Because the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the navigable waterways, has had to relieve the pressure of the immense flood crest, it has opened “spillways”, which divert some of the water into otherwise unused, or little-used, alternative channels. Above Baton Rouge, the Morganza Spillway has been opened for the first time since 1973 and is pouring out more water every second than goes over Niagara Falls.

Everyone who lives or works in the low-lying areas affected either by the main river flooding or by inundation from these diversion projects knew, well in advance, that these conditions were coming. Most made some preparations and, at least at the last minute, took evasive action by

evacuating from the lands and cities that would be drowned. Some few, however, stubbornly ignored all warnings and are now in extreme peril.

Do you not think it is extremely odd that almost everyone will take radical steps to save self, family, and neighbors from a temporary hazard such as a river flood, and only a few will ignore the looming disaster, but with their ultimate fates, just the opposite is the case? For in the face of Our Lord's next Coming, and our resurrections and judgements, and our ultimate assignments to either heaven or hell, most dither and refuse to face the emergency, or to prepare for it. Only a very few take seriously the certainty that these events are on their way and then prepare themselves rationally for what they know will come.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>xviii</sup>  
May 22, 2011.

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<sup>i</sup> "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).

<sup>ii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxiii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>iii</sup> *Daniel 12:1-4, 13 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *I Thessalonians 4:13-end (KJV).*

<sup>v</sup> *Daniel 12:2 (KJV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *Among other things, he teaches that Christians should avoid going to church because there they may hear messages that differ from his own and that all Biblical exegesis is false except his. As Victor Hugo Schiro, then Mayor of New Orleans, announced in 1965 during Hurricane Betsy, "Don't believe any false rumors, unless you hear them from me."*

<sup>vii</sup> "Brother Harold", whose training is in civil engineering, made the same prediction back in 1994, according to Garance Burke, *Christian movement preparing for End of Days*, Associated Press, retrieved May 21, 2011 from [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110521/ap\\_on\\_re\\_us/us\\_apocalypse\\_saturday](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110521/ap_on_re_us/us_apocalypse_saturday) See, also, *An insider's look at Family Radio and its leader Harold Camping*, *Contra Costa Times*, 5/21/2011, retrieved from [http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-news/ci\\_18107360?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.mercurynews.com/bay-area-news/ci_18107360?nclick_check=1)

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<sup>viii</sup> Some point out this will actually be His **third** Coming to Earth, because He came among us for the first time at His Incarnation and for the second time at His Resurrection.

<sup>ix</sup> *I Thessalonians 4:16a (KJV).*

<sup>x</sup> *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>xi</sup> *I Thessalonians 4:16b (KJV).*

<sup>xii</sup> *Daniel 12:2a (KJV).*

<sup>xiii</sup> *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>xiv</sup> *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

<sup>xv</sup> *Daniel 12:2b (KJV).*

<sup>xvi</sup> *I Thessalonians 4:17b (KJV).*

<sup>xvii</sup> *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

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