

Sermon for Morning Prayer Pentecost, or Whitsunday

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of The Wisdom of Solomon.

“Love righteousness, ye that be judges of the earth: think of the Lord with a good (heart,) and in simplicity of heart seek him. For he will be found of them that tempt him not; and sheweth himself unto such as do not distrust him. For froward thoughts separate from God: and his power, when it is tried, reproveth the unwise. For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin. For the holy spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in. For wisdom is a loving spirit; and will not acquit a blasphemer of his words: for God is witness of his reins, and a true beholder of his heart, and a hearer of his tongue. For the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world: and that which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.

“... The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias [*Mess-EYE-uss*] cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “For the holy spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in.” In the Name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today, on the Feast of Pentecost, or “White Sunday”, we celebrate the real birthday of the Christian Church. It was with the descent that day of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles that the Church became what it still is, namely the general presence of God in the world.

In that connection, think for a moment about that phrase from today’s First Lesson: “The holy spirit of discipline”. This “spirit” is clearly the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, Who descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost. That is, this Spirit is God, and we are told today that this Spirit brings to us, of all things, discipline. This is strange to us: in the Western culture of the Twenty-First Century, we are most unaccustomed to consider *discipline* to be something *holy*; still less are we accustomed

Theme:

A truth that is imbedded in Scripture is that our God is God of *order*, not of *chaos*. *Disorder, confusion, and indiscipline* are always symptoms of ungodliness.

“Order” does not mean absolute uniformity but it does mean general agreement in essentials, such as in the essential elements of the Faith, in the overall pattern of organization of the Church, and in the basic ways in which we worship. The nature of order as an attribute of God begins with the process of creation.

Development:**1. The essential nature of creation is the bringing order out of chaos.**

The first chapter of Genesis begins with a description of disorganized elements, out of which God would bring the created universe by imposing order on those elements: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon

the face of the deep.” As the remainder of that chapter makes clear, God proceeded to create the physical universe, first by providing light and then by placing each element in its own place, that is, by organizing it.

The remainder of the Old Testament is, at bottom, simply the account of God’s long, patient schooling of the Hebrews, to make them into an orderly, organized, and well instructed people. He taught them about His own existence and nature, He taught them about the relationship He wished to have with them, He taught them how they were to behave as individuals and as a group, and He formed them into a nation, that is, into an organized society.

It is notable that when God taught those ancient Jews how to behave, He gave them a comprehensive set of rules, summarized in the Ten Commandments. These rules enabled them to live with each other and to maintain a relationship with Him. That is, God’s rules and regulations permitted the Hebrews to live in *order* and therefore to live in *peace* and *stability*.

Ever since God’s original act of creation, God’s work has been evidenced by the existence of decency, good order, and discipline, and the devil’s work has been evidenced by attempts to undermine decency, create disorder, and tempt mankind into indiscipline.

2. God’s dedication to order is reflected in the manner in which the Christian Church is organized, that is, in what we call its “polity”.

When God reached the stage of removing the Hebrew tribes from Egypt in order to establish them in independence as a separate people and nation, one of His first steps was to inspire Jethro, Moses’s father in law, to advise Moses on their organization into a rational, hierarchical form. Thus at Jethro’s suggestion, Moses appointed “heads over all the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”

God’s continued concern for the internal organization of the Jewish people later caused Him to appoint Saul as King of Israel. It is instructive that, in the account in I Samuel, explicit references are made to Moses’s organization of the Hebrews. Thus Samuel directed the people to assemble so that he could announce to them God’s selection of Saul: “Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by

your tribes, and by your thousands.” Then, when Saul proved to have been an improvident selection, God deposed Saul and appointed David in his place.

In much the same way, the New Testament tells us how this process continued within the New Israel, the Church. Our Lord provided for its leadership by appointed and empowering His Apostles and those, in turn, were inspired to appoint successors after them. In this connection, it is especially to be noted that one of St. Paul’s very first injunctions to his disciple, St. Titus, was the reminder, “For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee....”

3. The godliness of good order and discipline is reflected even in the manner in which the Church has traditionally worshipped.

In Acts of the Apostles, we see that immediately upon Christ’s Ascension, His followers began to worship Him in a way that is recognizable to us as what we still do today. Thus: “[U]pon the first day of the week, ... the disciples came together to break bread....”

This ageless uniformity in the most central act of Christian worship, the Eucharist, is specially symbolized by something we celebrate today. This Whitsunday, or Pentecost, 2009, is the 460th anniversary of the introduction of the first Book of Common Prayer, that is, of the first Mass rite in the English language. Because that Book of Common Prayer has arguably been the single most important factor in the development of a distinctive Anglican religious tradition, we also celebrate today what could reasonably be viewed as the real birthday of Anglicanism itself.

And this development is intimately related to the themes with which we began this discourse today, those of *decency* and *order*. Archbishop Cranmer himself explained and defended his translation of the Latin Mass, and redaction of that translation, by appealing to those principles. Thus he wrote in the original *Preface* to his BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER that “The first and original ground” of “the Common Prayers in the Church, commonly called Divine Service” was “that the same was ... ordained ... of a good purpose, and for the advancement of godliness.”

Thus he cited “the ancient Fathers” as having “so ordered the matter, that the whole Bible (or the greatest part thereof) should be read over once every year....” Note the express form of those words: “they so ordered the matter....” That is, they

imposed a disciplined, regular pattern or order upon the lectionary for the daily Offices. As with the readings, so, too with ceremonies.

“[T]he willful and contemptuous transgression and breaking of a common order and discipline is no small offence before God. Let all things be done among you, saith St. Paul, in a seemly and due order....”

Archbishop Cranmer’s second concern was that the people should understand what was read to them in such an orderly fashion, so that they might appropriate and benefit from its lessons: “And furthermore, whereas St. Paul would have such language spoken to the people in the Church, as they might understand, and have profit by hearing the same; the Service in this Church of England these many years hath been read in Latin to the people, which they understand not; so that they have heard with their ears only, and their heart, spirit, and mind, have not been edified thereby.”

There we have two of the prime features of our Common Prayer tradition: first, order, so that, second, the people may be instructed and, the Archbishop implied, may amend their lives accordingly.

Conclusion:

Thus, as we celebrate this joint birthday, both of the Church and of the Book of Common Prayer, let us also celebrate God’s priceless gift to us not only of *order*, but of His own *Spirit-guided order*. So He not only enables us to worship Him, but enables us to do so in a manner that is obedient, and so pleasing, to Him.

And as we do so, we are joining ourselves with the countless generations of Christians, from the first Apostles and disciples until now, who have all worshipped Him in essentially the same, unbroken fashion: by coming together on the first day of the week, to break bread in memory of Our Lord and His Sacrifice for us.

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*The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister
May 31, 2009.*

- 1 *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*
- 2 *Wisdom 1:1-7 (KJV).*
- 3 *St. John 4:19-26 (KJV).*
- 4 *The Hebrew word meschiach and the Greek word kristos both mean “the anointed one”.*
- 5 *Wisdom 1:5 (KJV).*
- 6 *Acts 2.*
- 7 *Genesis 1:2a (KJV).*
- 8 *Exodus 18:13-26.*
- 9 *Exodus 18:25 (KJV).*
- 10 *I Samuel 9:1-10:25 (KJV).*
- 11 *I Samuel 10:19b (KJV).*
- 12 *I Samuel 15.*
- 13 *II Samuel 2:1-4, 11; 5:5.*
- 14 *St. Matthew 10:1, 28:19-20; St. Mark 3:14-15, 6:7-11, 16:15; St. Luke 9:1-5, 22:28-30; St. John 20:23, 21:15-19; Acts 1:8.*
- 15 *I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9.*
- 16 *Titus 1:5 (KJV).*
- 17 *Acts 20:7 (KJV).*
- 18 *Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928, 5 (C of E 1928).*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Of Ceremonies, Why Some be Abolished, and Some Retained, op. cit.*
- 21 *Concerning the Service of the Church, supra,*

- 22 *Priest Associate, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, New Orleans (Metairie), LA. Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.*