

Sermon for Evening Prayer Pentecost, or Whitsunday

I. Lessons:ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-second Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon.ⁱⁱ

“... For wisdom, which is the worker of all things, taught me: for in her is an understanding spirit holy, one only, manifold, subtil, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do good, Kind to man, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and going through all understanding, pure, and most subtil, spirits. For wisdom is more moving than any motion: she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new: and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it. For after this cometh night: but vice shall not prevail against wisdom.

“Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the

wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the First Lesson: “I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words of wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction:

Today, the Feast of Pentecost, is the day we celebrate God's fulfillment of His promise that He would send the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, to dwell within His Church^v in a new and permanent way. This Spirit is sent to us to be “the Comforter”, which, in 17th Century English simply means “the Strengthener”.

All four Gospels record the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Our Lord at the time of His Baptism,^{vi} which was the commencement of His public ministry here on

earth. Similarly, the first Pentecost of the Church, with the descent of that same Holy Spirit upon the assembled Apostles and disciples^{vii} was the day on which it was fully equipped^{viii} for its mission to that same world, to be Our Lord's presence therein. Thus what we celebrate today is, in a very real way, the birthday of the Church.

IV. Theme:

The mission for which the Holy Spirit equips and strengthens the Church is, of course, the mission Our Lord gave us at the time He ascended into heaven: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”^{ix}

V. Development:

A. Our Lord promised us that, after His Ascension, He would send the Holy Spirit to enliven and guide His Church.^x

Typical of Saint John's words on this subject is this passage: “[T]he Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”^{xi}

B. Wisdom is one of the promised Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Today's First Lesson tells us, Wisdom “is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty....”^{xii} This emanation comes to us through the Holy Spirit Whom Our Lord promised the Father would send to us:

As St. Paul told the Corinthians, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom....”^{xiii} This is according to what today's Second Lesson tells us, that “[W]e have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.”^{xiv}

C. The presence of Wisdom, whether in the Church or in any individual member of the Church, is evidence of the presence of that Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity.

The First Lesson tells us that “God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom...”^{xv} Thus Wisdom is the unique gift of God alone, which, in turn, means that Wisdom is found only where God the Holy Spirit has brought it. So where we find Wisdom, there, too, do we find the Holy Spirit to be present and operating. And, conversely, where we find Wisdom is conspicuously absent, as she so clearly is from many self-styled but self-seeking “religious” leaders – we may be confident that the Holy Spirit does not waste a great deal of time there.

VI. Conclusion:

Remember always that God the Father has sent the Holy Spirit through His Son to enable us to enlighten others as to God’s existence and love for us. “Now we have received ... the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.”^{xvi}

Thus St. John is able to write, “[Y]ou are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world.... [W]hen the Counselor comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me and you are also witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.”^{xvii}

So, ultimately, God has not given us His Spirit as a private treasure, something to be hoarded by us for our own pleasure and amusement, but as a tool, something to enable us to fulfill His command^{xviii} that we go out and evangelize the world, converting it to faith and membership in Him. This is what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians, telling them that, for the Christian, the ground of wisdom is “nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”^{xix}

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May 23, 2010.

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

ⁱⁱ *Wisdom 7:22 – 8:1 (KJV).*

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- ⁱⁱⁱ *I Corinthians 2 (KJV).*
- ^{iv} *I Corinthians 2: 1-2 (RSV).*
- ^v *I Corinthians 3: 16.*
- ^{vi} *St. Matthew 3: 16-17; St. Mark 1: 10-11; St. Luke 3: 22; St. John 1: 32.*
- ^{vii} *Acts 2: 2-4.*
- ^{viii} *Acts 1: 8.*
- ^{ix} *St. Matthew 28: 19-20 (RSV).*
- ^x *St. John 14: 16-17, 14: 26, 15: 26, 16: 7-14.*
- ^{xi} *St. John 14: 26 (RSV).*
- ^{xii} *Wisdom of Solomon 7: 25 (RSV).*
- ^{xiii} *I Corinthians 12: 7-8 (RSV).*
- ^{xiv} *I Corinthians 2: 12 (RSV).*
- ^{xv} *Wisdom of Solomon 7: 28 (RSV).*
- ^{xvi} *I Corinthians 2: 12-13 (RSV).*
- ^{xvii} *St. John 15: 19, 26-27 (RSV).*
- ^{xviii} *St. Matthew 28: 18-20.*
- ^{xix} *I Corinthians 2: 2b (RSV).*