

Sermon for Morning Prayer: Advent II

The Reverend C. Richard Pumphrey, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy.

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes [DZAHN-ez] and Jambres [DZAHM-brez] withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was. But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Jesus once told a parable about a man who found a hidden treasure in a field. He then went and bought the whole field for joy. WE have a hidden treasure at our fingertips: this hidden treasure is the Holy Scriptures.

I was at the Egyptian girls' apartment the other day and was looking at Sally Bandy's Arabic Bible. I saw that it needed a bit of repair on the binding and offered to take it home and fix it. I repaired it and returned it to her.

While I had it, I looked through the Bible and saw that she actually had done what the Collect today asks that we do. She had read, marked, and inwardly digested the Scriptures.

Her Bible was well marked. How many of us have Bibles like that? Most of us, I hope. This is how we learn and many times how the Holy Spirit will communicate to us.

One rule of spiritual discipline should include a regular pattern of Bible reading. Many times it is through the Bible that we discover what is amiss within us and so we are led to change and repentance. Our rule should include habits of silence, times when we disconnect with the hurriedness and noise of the world and commune with God in the beauty of holiness.

When reading the Bible we find, much to the chagrin of some, that it is not a list of rules. Scripture is a whole fabric that tells a huge story. We ourselves are in that story. Jesus Christ is in the story; it is He who gives us the treasure that is hidden in the field. The Bible is not a list of proof texts to prove our debating points. The Bible tells the grand story of creation and the fall of mankind and the redemption of mankind. It tells the story of God's coming to earth, to His creation, to redeem it in the person of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

The Bible is not a boring book. It is full of history, interesting stories, and the promises of God. I have favorite passages, some of which I have memorized. Psalm 91, Psalm 23, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer all come to mind. The Bible has the first detective story in the form of the Book of Susanna. In the Book of Job it has a grand play about the bad things that happen to a good person. It tells the history of Israel, God's chosen people. It tells the future. It tells of a new Heaven and a new earth and a New Jerusalem. The Holy Scriptures give us hope. They educate us. They give us a sense of history and the panorama of God's plan.

I urge you all, as today's Collect advises us, to read, mark, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures and receive the blessing that awaits you therein.

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