

**Sermon for Morning Prayer:
Quinquagesima Sunday**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:

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

“... Wherefore I prayed, and understanding was given me: I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her before sceptres and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither compared I unto her any precious stone, because all gold in respect of her is as a little sand, and silver shall be counted as clay before her. I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light: for the light that cometh from her never goeth out. All good things together came to me with her, and innumerable riches in her hands. And I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom goeth before them: and I knew not that she was the mother of them. I learned diligently, and do communicate her liberally: I do not hide her riches. For she is a treasure unto men that never faileth: which they that use become the friends of God, being commended for the gifts that come from learning.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I

loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

"You are my friends if you do what I command you." St. John 15:14 (RSV).

Homily:

In an ancient oriental kingdom there was a very special class of people known "the friends of the king." These people were on the most intimate terms with the king, and enjoyed privileges that most people could hardly conceive of.

They had the full freedom of the palace and all its resources. They had access to the king at any hour of the day or night without an appointment. They could dine at his table whenever they wanted without an invitation. The friends of the king could enter the royal bedroom first thing in the morning and join the king for breakfast. The king would listen to them, enjoy their company, and grant them special favors and requests.

Such is the status that Jesus offers to all those who acknowledge His kingship and obey His commands. Not everyone enjoys this relationship with Jesus because not everyone acknowledges His authority. Those who acknowledge His kingship are those who obey His commandment. And what does He command? Listen to His words: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

How is it that Jesus has loved us? He has loved us in spite of our sins and with full knowledge of our many shortcomings and faults. He has loved us when we have failed to return His love. He has loved us when our behavior has been totally unacceptable to Him. He will not accept our sinful behavior, and He will not allow us to settle for anything less than a full and true reflection of the nature of God. Nevertheless, Jesus has loved us to the point of laying down His life for us. Such is the friendship that He offers us, and such is the friendship He requires of us with respect to each other.

Friendship, of course, means more than just access and more than just acceptance. Friendship means intimacy. It means sharing secrets. True friendship means that you know what your friend is really like. You know her philosophy of life. You know what he likes and does not like. You know how she thinks. You know his moral standards. You know what motivates her. You know his plans and his dreams, her hopes and her fears. You know the private *persona* that is behind the public *persona*. You know his faults, but you like him anyway. That is what it means to have a friend.

There is a great hunger in the world today for that kind of intimacy. Unfortunately, people today tend to think of intimacy in terms of sex. So when the Bible says that the heart of Jonathan was knit to the heart of David, and that David loved Jonathan as he loved his own soul, there are those who interpret that to mean that the two men were homosexually involved with each other. Definitely an unwarranted assumption.

Some people think, wrongly I hasten to add, that sex will produce intimacy. That is one reason people engage in sexual activity before marriage. In so many cases it is really the intimacy that people want, and the sex is wrongly seen as a necessary component of it.

On the other hand, there are those who shy away from intimacy. They refuse to share experiences or hopes or fears or any other really personal material. They keep their thoughts and their feelings to themselves and hold everyone at a safe psychological distance. In other words, they have no friends, and tend to be very lonely.

The apostolic writers, when they talk about the Church, invariably emphasize both intimacy and chastity among the faithful.

The author of Hebrews says, “Let brotherly love continue. ... Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled. ... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

St. James says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” St. Peter says, “Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called that you may obtain a blessing.”

St. Paul says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” These are all apostolic elaborations of Our Lord’s commandment.

We are able to treat each other that way, or should be able to, because we are all under the authority of the same Lord. We acknowledge the same duty. We are led by the same Spirit. We have similar experiences and similar values. If that were not true it would be very difficult to be friends with each other. We would have very little to say to each other and would probably not be very comfortable in each other’s presence.

But Jesus calls us to friendship with each other by inviting us to friendship with Himself. He says to His disciples, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

To be a friend of Christ is to know the mind of God, because Jesus is the living manifestation, the perfect expression in human form of what the Father desires and intends for us all. St. John says, “If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” By our obedience to His commandment we are drawn into the life of Christ, and by being drawn into His life we are drawn into the life of God.

We become friends of the King. We have access to Him at any time. We need no special invitation to join Him at His table. We may sit with Him in silence and enjoy His company. We may ask for what we need, and be confident that we will receive it. That is the relationship that Jesus offers us and desires to have with us. And so He says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

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