

SERMON FOR MORNING OR EVENING PRAYER

At a Church Conventionⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixtieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah [**EE-fuh**]; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew [**SHOW**] forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar [**KEY-durr**] shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth [**neh-BYE-awth**] shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory. Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish [**TARR-shish**] first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves

down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee; The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou has been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.^{iv}

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to

another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Concerning Spiritual gifts, where have they gone? In our Epistle, Paul is giving instructions on the diversity of spiritual gifts to the Corinthians. First he speaks on the gift of faith. He tells the Corinthians that no man can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.

This confirms what we have been speaking on, that it is only by the grace of God that we can have the faith to come to repentance. Faith is a gift that comes after the Holy Spirit begins to draw us in by breathing the breath of resurrection life into us and revealing the Father's provisions for us.

And then he begins to speak on the other gifts. Gifts that seem to have lost their place within our Churches. Gifts that seem foreign to us and ludicrous when mentioned. Gifts such as knowledge, wisdom, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues, these were hallmark qualities of the Christian Church shortly after the day of Pentecost. These first believers operated within these gifts knowing full well they were to continue the work and ministry of Christ after His Ascension.

There is the duality of Christ's nature that we sometimes forget. The hypostatic union of both the human and the divine, something we celebrate on the Feast of the Transfiguration.

The Church is also both human and divine. Even though we belong to this world by birth, we hold residency in the heavenlies by our rebirth in Christ Jesus. We are infused with the Spirit of the living God to carry out His mission to seek and save the lost, but He has purposed for us these gifts in which to demonstrate His power and authority over all mankind.

How glorious it would be for us to realize that we are the hands and feet of God, the continuation of the Incarnation of Christ. That the same authority to cast out demons, heal the sick, make the lame to walk again was given to us on the day of Pentecost.

These gifts were given to demonstrate the power and authority of God over everything, even when believers were still oppressed by political tyrants. What has changed? We find ourselves toiling in this world, concerned about the political unrest of these last days. All the while, God is waiting for us to begin to have the faith in Him again in which he can display His mighty hand at work.

He is waiting for us to come to the realization that we don't know what the future may hold, but that we should press forward to know Him, because it is He that holds the future in His hand. And that we should cast off the cares of this world, in pursuit of demonstrating His creative power over everything, natural and supernatural.

Some people say that the age for these works have come and gone, that they were only poured out upon the believers in Jerusalem and Antioch, to legitimize and confirm the ministry and mission of the Church in her mission to spread the Gospel to all nations. And that the need for these gifts is no longer viable because the Church has fulfilled the Great Commission. She has gone into all the world. And the need for God to demonstrate His creative power to the pagan Gentiles has passed.

This belief is called cessationism, or that the spiritual gifts have ceased to be active in the Church. But have we truly looked around us lately? Let's look at America. With a church building on every street corner, America is slipping off into a post-modern, post-Christian existence. Secular culture has become pagan in its understanding and ritual. Everything from movies, music, sports, mobile technology, computers, televisions, in our secular society these have taken the place of God.

Many Americans do not know the Gospel message, have never heard the Name of Jesus, and if they have, it has been tainted with dead religiosity that does not save or penetrate the sinner's heart. America has become one of the largest mission fields. Enough so, that the Anglican provinces of poverty-stricken Africa have begun missionary efforts here on American soil, in a so-called Christian nation.

The need for us to rise up and place all of our faith and trust in God makes us vessels of clay, in which He can pour into us His spiritual gifts, so that we can demonstrate His mighty hand at work is here. And that's where we have the issue.

We have been told for so long that these gifts were no longer available that we have stopped believing in their efficacy. You know the only time in Jesus' earthly ministry, where He was not able to perform

His mighty work, was when He encountered corporate unbelief from those in His own home town of Nazareth.^v St. Mark tells us He could do no mighty work there and that He marveled because of their unbelief. All He could do was go about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

These verses from St. Mark echo the spiritual state of the Church today because we have allowed ourselves to be infiltrated by bad theology, this cessationism. Jesus cannot perform His mighty work within His own Body because we corporately do not believe that He can or will anymore. It's not about one's individual faith; it's about the heart of the Body of Christ.

Jesus never requested that the disciples go out and pray for the sick; He commanded them to go out and heal the sick. As St. Matthew says, "These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But rather go to the lost sheep of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand. HEAL the sick, CLEANSE the lepers, RAISE the dead, CAST out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."^{vi}

Of course salvation was offered first to the Jews. That's why Jesus commanded them to go only to the lost sheep of Israel, until they rejected Jesus as God's Anointed, the Messiah. And then the Gentiles would become benefactors of God's grace and mercy, being grafted into the vine of God's provision. So Christ commanded the Twelve to go out and preach the Kingdom while demonstrating Christ's authority over every living thing, and every spiritual entity.

Many people assume Jesus gave this authority only to the Twelve, and therefore authority to operate within those gifts lies only in those who are in succession to the Twelve, who are the bishops, and then subsequently, the priests and deacons under this episcopal authority. But obviously this is not the case, because Paul was writing to the entirety of the CHURCH at Corinth, and not the Hierarchy alone. He was admonishing both lay and leaders.

The Hierarchy of the Church is given spiritual authority, an authority which originated from Christ, given to the Apostles, and

passed on and perpetuated by the laying on of hands throughout the generations to the clergy of the Church, to govern the Body, and offer Christ to the elect of God both in the preaching of the Word, and administration of the seven Sacraments.

But as the Church, we are a Kingdom of priests, “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; That you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”^{vii} We are all called out by God to go into the world, to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand, while demonstrating the awesomeness of God’s power and authority.

When we begin to believe that God is who He says He is, and that God can do what He says He will do, and that we are who He says we are in Christ Jesus, then we will begin to see the Hand of God move mightily across this nation, across the world. But we have to rid ourselves of our corporate unbelief. And when we do, we won’t be the First Church of the Frozen Chosen anymore, but will begin to be instruments that God uses to display to the world His miraculous hand at work.

We don’t need the hyper-sensationalism or hyper-emotionalism of our modern, charismatic counterparts. It doesn’t take all of that. We don’t have to coax the Spirit of God into moving mightily. What we do need, though, is faith and trust in God, and a belief that what He has bestowed on one generation of believers is just as relevant to all generations of believers.

We have the witness of the Spirit of God throughout all generation in our ancient, Biblical liturgy. What we lack is a belief in the power of that same Spirit.

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ⁱ *This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, 2011.*

ⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Isaiah 60:1-end (KJV).*

^{iv} *I Corinthians 12:1-26 (KJV).*

^v *St. Mark 6:1-6.*

^{vi} *St. Mark 10:5-8 (emphasis supplied).*

^{vii} *1 Peter 2:9.*

^{viii} *Priest, The Anglican Province of Christ the King; Rector, St. Charles King and Martyr Anglican Church, Huntsville, AL.*