

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Easter Sunday

Lessons: ⁱ

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

“O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew. ⁱⁱⁱ

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*] and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great

earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

“And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

“....

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

To borrow a phrase from a minister of another denomination, “Free at last, free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last!”^v

Easter Day is come. Easter is the crowning jewel and joy of all the Christian year. It is the day on which we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the day when we know our Lord has defeated all the powers of evil and has assured for us a place in Heaven.

Consider the changes we have seen in only the last week. On Palm Sunday, we witnessed the triumphant entry of our Lord into Jerusalem to delirious shouts of praise and joy. “*Hosanna in the Highest,*” cried the crowds. “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*”^{vi} The people in the crowds spread their clothes and palm branches in the way to glorify Jesus.

But they misunderstood His mission and purpose. Only days after receiving Him so gloriously, those very crowds turned on our Lord as they realized that He was not the earthly military leader they wanted. He was not a military man, gathering an army to throw out the Romans, but instead a spiritual leader who intended to save Israel from her sins.

The high hopes held by the people of Jerusalem were dashed, and they turned their anger on not their oppressors, but on Jesus. All this happened in order that He might suffer the shameful death of trial, scourging and crucifixion for us. Even one of Jesus’ own Apostles turned on Him, betraying Him to the authorities for thirty pieces of silver.

His followers were no doubt stunned beyond comprehension. Even when our Lord had told them plainly what must happen to Him, they had not believed it. They could not conceive of a world without Him in it, nor of any power on Earth that could defeat Him. And yet, Jesus was tried by mere men. He was convicted by hypocrites and frauds, men who were more anxious to protect their own power than to serve justice. Even Pilate—who knew Jesus to be an innocent man—went along with the plot and ordered Jesus killed.

On Maundy Thursday, we watched and waited with horror at the impending doom. We agonized with our Lord at the last supper He would enjoy with His Apostles. But in that agony, we also found the pattern for our worship. As His earthy life was ending, He was preparing a Heavenly life for us all.

On Good Friday we winced with each of the thirty-nine lashes our Lord endured. We shrank from the pain of the scourge, which tears away chunks of skin as it is pulled from the body. We walked each step along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem as Jesus painfully carried His cross to Golgotha, crying out while our Lord endured His pain in silence. We reached out to Him as He falls—three times. We felt our eyes well with tears as Jesus—in such agony—still attempted to comfort the women of Jerusalem.

And finally, we reached the awful hill outside the city where our Lord was to be killed. We saw Him thrown down on the rough-hewn wood of the Cross, His arms flung wide in the grotesque parody of His loving embrace of the world. As each of the three nails were driven through His flesh, we cried out in pain, but still our Lord was silent. Only later, as He hung from the Cross, did He finally speak.

He forgave those who tormented Him, and told one of the thieves crucified alongside Him that he would join Him in Heaven.^{vii}

He instructed His mother to hold in her heart His disciples.^{viii}

He cried out to God the Father in His agony^{ix}, then stated, “*I thirst.*”^x

Finally, as He prepared to pass from earthly life, Jesus said, “*It is finished,*”^{xi} and as He committed His Spirit to the Father, “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*”^{xii}

After He died, His precious bloody and beaten body was removed from the Cross, and buried in a nearby tomb owned by one of His followers, Joseph of Arimathea. His followers went into hiding. The movement of Jesus Christ seemed to be over. The women who followed Him went to His grave early Sunday morning to anoint His body in the customary way.

When they arrive at the tomb, however, they are stunned to see it open. The huge stone placed there by the Pharisees had been moved aside. When they gather the courage to look inside the tomb, it is empty, with our Lord’s burial cloths folded where He had been laid. The women’s horror at what they must have supposed to be a grave robbery is replaced by stunned joy when Jesus Himself appears to them moments later to tell them to go inform His disciples of what had happened.

We can only imagine their tearful, confused, excited attempts to explain what they have seen. When the confused disciples arrive at last at the tomb to see for themselves, they too encounter Jesus, and He tells them to go to Galilee, where He will meet with them.

Could it be possible that Jesus, who they had seen crucified, yet lives? Could the most resounding defeat they could have ever imagined have been turned into a victory after all?

When Jesus meets them in Galilee, He explains the truth to them: “*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*”

The battle, which they had not been able even to comprehend, has been won. Salvation has been achieved. All that had been promised by the prophets has now come true: “*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*”

Jesus has opened paradise to men. He had been right all along when He told them that the puny powers of men on earth mean nothing. His predictions were precisely correct. His victory is complete.

In winning that victory, Jesus not only defeats death and the powers of evil. In winning that victory, He sets us free—each of us—from sin.

That is why we can truly say: “*Free at last, free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*”

Let us pray.

Eternal Savior, we thank You that You have indeed opened paradise to all believers. By enduring the Cross and grave, You defeated death and all the powers of evil that seek to do us woe. We owe all to Your loving-kindness and gracious mercy. Help us each day to live into the Easter promise and in Your time, allow us to join with You in paradise where with all Your Saints we will join in the eternal chorus, “We cry Hosanna, Lord!” Amen.

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

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 25: 1-9 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Matthew 28: 1-10, 16-20 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV).*

^v *From the “I Have A Dream” speech. Dr. Martin Luther King, August 28, 1963 in Washington D.C.*

^{vi} *St. Mark 11:9 (KJV).*

^{vii} *St. Luke 23:34 and 43 respectively (KJV).*

^{viii} *St. John 19:26 (KJV).*

^{ix} *St. Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 (KJV).*

^x *St. John 19:28 (KJV).*

^{xi} *St. John 19:30 (KJV).*

^{xii} *St. Luke 23:46 (KJV).*

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