

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Third Sunday after Trinity¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.³

“And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed. And Elkanah [*el-KAY-nuh*] went to Ramah to his house. And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.

“Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial [*BEE-lee-ull*]; they knew not the LORD. And the priest’s custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three

teeth in his hand; And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

“But Samuel ministered before the LORD, being a child, girded with a linen ephod [EE0-fahd]. Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli blessed Elkanah [el-KAY-nuh] and his wife, and said, The LORD give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the LORD. And they went unto their own home. And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.”

Or,

Here beginneth the third Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.⁴

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel.

—oo0oo—

The Rev'd Robert Hart¹⁰
November 1, 2011

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on All Saints' Day, 2011.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 39 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (CIPBC 1963).

³ I Samuel 2:1-21 (KJV).

⁴ I Samuel 3:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Job 28:1-end (KJV).

⁶ Matthew 4:23—5:16 (KJV).

⁷ Matthew 5:8 (KJV).

⁸ John 3:15-17 (KJV).

⁹ Hosea 6:3 (KJV).

¹⁰ Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

possible, I suppose, to slip into idolatry and to worship saints and angels—and some people have. But, that is not a likely error for most Anglicans. I think we all know that only God is to be worshiped as God. The ancient practice of asking the saints to pray for us is not idolatry, and should not be condemned as if it were. I can make no guarantee that they have a more than merely human capacity to hear everyone, for that would indicate that they somehow shared the Divine attribute of omnipresence (which they simply cannot). I cannot place my faith in any one of them that way. Bu, I know that they must be praying for the Church militant. For they have been made perfect in charity.

Again, the subject of devotions to saints is not our focus on that Feast of All Saints. Our focus then has always been the call that God has given to all of us, the call to become, by grace, saints ourselves. That is, we are called to be holy, to be faithful in every area of our lives, to press on to know the Lord, to confess the sins we fall into and repent of them in order to be forgiven, and also to be cleansed and delivered from the power of sin. We are called to develop the Christian virtues, faith, hope, charity, and the Cardinal virtues, fortitude, justice, prudence and temperance. Above all of the others, charity, the bond of perfection.

In order to begin to answer the call to holiness, we must be thankful. And, that is the best reason to look at the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God, lifted up on the cross as Moses lifted the serpent on the pole in the wilderness. It is in thanksgiving that our hearts begin to render for Christ's great act of love, that our souls are healed, not treating us as our sins deserve, but rather dying as our atonement. In that love we begin to see the reflection of Divine glory. Like that reflection I saw as a child, wearing a box as a helmet on my head, we see the glory of God the way I saw a projection of the sun. And like the innumerable reflections of the partial sun that I saw across the ground, we see radiant glory in the great company of saints who have gone before, and who now, with hearts made pure by grace, behold the glory of God.

And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

“And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

“And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew [SHOW] Eli the vision. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

“And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.”

Or,

Here beginneth the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Book of Job.⁵

“Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone. He setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death. The flood breaketh out from the inhabitant; even the waters forgotten of the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from men. As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire. The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold. There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen: The lion’s whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light. But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith [SETH], It is not in me: and the sea saith [SETH], It is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight

infinite, and our knowledge of Him once made perfect will be ever perfected more and more, endless knowledge, joy and love.

Yet we must never presume on God’s grace. Hell is the eternal denial of this joy; not that God denies it to us, but that we deny it to ourselves if we do not make it our aim to know Him.

Think of the words we call the Summary of the Law. The first and great commandment is the impossible call to be saints, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind, and then to love your neighbor as yourself. When you look at the Epistles of Saint Paul, in the opening of the Epistle to the Romans and the first Epistle to the Corinthians, you see that all of the people who belong to the Church are “called to be saints.”

I like the King James Bible, with that accurate translation “called to be saints.” That “called to be” part is missing from the understanding of a good many Protestant revivalists, fundamentalists and Pentecostals. They teach that every Christian is a saint just by, as they like to say, “accepting Jesus.” Meanwhile, the opposite error belongs to those who seem to think of saints as if they were comic book superheroes, people with special abilities like Superman born on Krypton, or Spiderman with his radioactive bug bite that enables him to do amazing things. We mere mortals cannot be like them, and it’s best just to be normal.

Well, the truth is that a saint is a holy person. That is what the word means. And, the truth is that everyone who belongs to Christ has the vocation to be a saint. We have not yet arrived at being perfected as saints, but neither are we supposed to leave that to a special class of superheroes. Scripture commands us to “follow on to know the Lord.”⁹

This is shown by the Feast on our calendar that is devoted to All Saints. The most important thing that we Anglicans focus on that day is not the issue of devotions to the saints. Sure, it is

the Mount is the Gospel for the Feast of all Saints. The Church long has used the word “saints” to speak of those we believe to have entered already into the perfect state that allows them to be granted the *Beatific Vision*. That is, to see God as God, the final perfect destiny of the human creature by grace.

Because we are not ready for the Beatific Vision, we must, for now, see God the way I saw the sun during the solar eclipse in my childhood. What we see, that is the sight of God in Jesus Christ, is real. And, real also is what you see when I hold the Sacrament up and tell you to Behold the Lamb of God. We see that reality in a way that is given to us by God’s love, because He saves us by showing Himself. Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”⁸

We see Him in His human nature, lifted up on the cross. We see Him as the Lamb of God, ourselves not worthy that he should come under our roof, but asking that He speak the word only, and our souls shall be healed. Yes, what we see is real. And what we see is granted to us in a way that saves us rather than destroys us, for He came to save us. Our sinfulness, our weakness and our foolishness is all taken into account by the Father, and what we do not see is due to His mercy. The fullness of Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, and the Holy Spirit is really and truly present within the Church—within us with all His gifts. But our destiny is to behold the sun in its strength when our eyes are made able to endure the brightness, able to endure seeing God as God. We are meant to know Him as He is, to behold throughout eternity the Beatific Vision, a vision not stagnant because He is

for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁶

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for

great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

I recall my very first solar eclipse, probably about 1961 or 1962, when I could not have been more than four years old. I remember it well. My mother was very careful to tell me not to look directly at the sun, because it was very possible that I could go blind if I did. During a solar eclipse, we can look at the sun, not realizing that the infrared rays are every bit as destructive to the optic nerve as ever. Our eyes cannot take those rays in their full strength. So, I was told not to look up when the sky would darken, but to look down and so preserve my eyesight.

A cousin, who lived across the street, came over with a cardboard box, that, if worn like a helmet over the head, due to a hole cut in the back and a white sheet of paper as a viewing screen placed in front, could be used to see the reflection of the eclipse. It was a partial eclipse, and I recall that on the white screen I saw the sun with a dark round shadow in front of it,

causing the reflection of the sun to appear like the moon, when it is only partly visible. The sun appeared shaped like a quarter moon, reflected inside the box-helmet. Even more strange, when I removed the box from my head, on the ground a thousand such reflections appeared, little quarter-moon images of the sun. We could not look directly at the brightness of the sun with any safety, but we could look at the endless reflections all over the ground. I have never seen that particular effect from an eclipse on any other occasion in about fifty years since that day. But I cannot forget what it looked like.

That is an illustration for us. In our condition as fallen creatures, subject in this world to sin and death, we cannot not look upon the undiluted glory of God in its perfection. It is not a danger, because it cannot happen; for if it happened we would be unable to endure it. It is true that Christ said, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.” But this was accomplished by His coming to us as a man. Even on the Mount of Transfiguration it was His glorified humanity that shined with the brightness of the sun in its strength. He made known His divine presence by everything He said and did, especially by defeating death when in His resurrection He ushered in immortality. But never did He unleash on anyone a perfect glimpse of His divine nature, for to do so would not have been merciful, but rather terrifying. So, He took human nature in its fullness, and this became a part of Him forever by a loving and gracious act of His will. Human nature served as His icon, a perfect image of the Father for us to see. Similarly, His Presence here today is very real, but made food for us under “these shadows mean” of bread and wine.

We do hope to see God some day, and not only in the human nature taken by the Son, though never will it be set aside; And whenever we see God we cannot do so without seeing Christ Jesus, for the Trinity cannot be divided or dissected. The goal and hope of Christians is to see God as our Lord Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” This one little line is the reason why this passage that opens the Sermon on