

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity<sup>1</sup>**

**I. Lessons:<sup>2</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>3</sup>

“My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.

“When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoyce to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Proverbs.<sup>4</sup>

“My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

“Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

“My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.

“My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the deso-

lation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.”

*Or,*

Here beginneth the twenty-ninth Verse of the second Chapter of the First Book of the Maccabees.<sup>5</sup>

“... Then many that sought after justice and judgment went down into the wilderness to dwell there: Both they, and their cattle; because afflictions increased sore upon them. Now when it was told the king’s servants, and the host that was at Jerusalem, in the city of David, that certain men, who had broken the king’s commandment, were gone down into the secret places in the wilderness, They pursued after them a great number, and having overtaken them, they camped against them, and made war against them on the sabbath day. And they said unto them, Let that which ye have done hitherto suffice; come forth, and do according to the commandment of the king, and ye shall live. But they said, We will not come forth, neither will we do the king’s commandment, to profane the sabbath day. So then they gave them the battle with all speed. Howbeit they answered them not, neither cast they a stone at them, nor stopped the places where they lay hid; But said, Let us die all in our innocency: heaven and earth shall testify for us, that ye put us to death wrongfully. So they rose up against them in battle on the sabbath, and they slew them, with their wives and children, and their cattle, to the number of a thousand people. Now when Mattathias and his friends understood hereof, they mourned for them right sore. And one of them said to another, If we all do as our brethren have done, and fight not for our lives and laws against the heathen, they will now quickly root us out of the earth. At that time therefore they decreed, saying, Whosoever shall come to make battle with us on the sabbath day, we will fight against him; neither will we die all, as our brethren that were murdered in the secret places. Then came there unto him a company of Assideans, who were mighty men of Israel, even all such as were voluntarily devoted unto the law. Also all they

that fled for persecution joined themselves unto them, and were a stay unto them. So they joined their forces, and smote sinful men in their anger, and wicked men in their wrath: but the rest fled to the heathen for succour. Then Mattathias and his friends went round about, and pulled down the altars: And what children soever they found within the coast of Israel uncircumcised, those they circumcised valiantly. They pursued also after the proud men, and the work prospered in their hand. So they recovered the law out of the hand of the Gentiles, and out of the hand of kings, neither suffered they the sinner to triumph.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.<sup>6</sup>

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in

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<sup>2</sup> *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 44 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x1 (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxix (CIPBC 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 2:1-end (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 3:1-26 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> I *Maccabees* 2:29-48 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> I Corinthians 13:1-13 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 13:8 (KJV).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 12:1 (KJV).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 13:3 (KJV).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* (RSV).

<sup>11</sup> *Article XIII, Of Works before Justification*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 603 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>13</sup> Priest Associate, Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA; Honorary Canon, The Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

animate our giving is, as we said before, properly our personal response to the love God has shown toward us, particularly in His sending His Son to die for our redemption. If God loves all men and women to that unimaginable extent, how can they fail to deserve our love as well?

Thus our love for others is intimately connected with our love for God which is itself necessarily based in our belief in Him. After all, we cannot reasonably love Someone in whose existence, or loveableness, we do not believe.

This is also why the Articles of Religion teach us that “Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; ... for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done [that is, out of love for Him], ... they have the nature of sin.”<sup>11</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion.**

This, then, is at bottom the essence of the message St. Paul taught to the Corinthians; as we say in almost every celebration of the Mass:

**T**HOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.<sup>12</sup>

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister, JD<sup>13</sup>  
February 22, 2009

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on Quinquagesima Sunday, 2009.

part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

## **II. Text:**

From the Second Lesson: “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”<sup>7</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

## **III. Introduction.**

Today’s Second Lesson is Chapter 13 of First Corinthians. The prior Chapter, Chapter 12, begins with St. Paul’s famous words, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”<sup>8</sup> Chapter 12 goes on to give a general overview of the place of such gifts in the Church. That discussion then continues with St. Paul’s detailed consideration of two of the most obvious among those gifts: love and speaking in tongues.

Notice, please, two significant differences between Paul’s respective treatments of these two gifts. First, he places love before speaking in tongues, implying that it is a more important gift. Then he confirms that suspicion because he writes at great length about the virtues and value of love and then at almost equal length about the essential uselessness of tongues, at least in the public worship of the Church.

## **IV. Theme.**

Our reading for today, Chapter 13, is the first of those specific discussions and is devoted to the topic of love as a spiritual gift. That is a very significant insight: that the capacity to

love is a gift from God. This implies, correctly, that we do not automatically have this capacity and, therefore, that absent His gift of it to us, we are unable fully or completely to love others.

In other words, our love of others is a reflection of, and a product of, our love for God, which itself originates in our response to His love for us.

## **V. Developement.**

In the Anglican Catholic Church, our official translation of Scripture for use in the public services of the Church is, of course, the King James or “Authorized” Version. After all, the original purpose for which that translation was made was to provide the text for the readings in our services.

My text from that was, once again, “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

Note that the King James Version uses the word “charity”, which comes from the Latin *caritas*, meaning simply “love”. This is what “charity” meant to the Jacobeans while, between their time and ours, the meaning of “charity” has tended to narrow to the point where it now connotes specifically philanthropic or eleemosynary activities rather than “love” in general.

This distinction is shown in one of the passages of today’s Second Lesson: “Although I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, ... and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”<sup>9</sup> In the modern acceptance of the word “charity”, this appears to be a self-contradictory statement but it becomes much clearer in the Revised Standard Version and in other similar modern translations: “If I give away all I have, ... but have not love, I gain nothing.”<sup>10</sup>

At this point you might well say to yourselves, “If I give my goods and treasure to others, that shows that I love them. Why else would I give these things to them?”

A few moments’ thought will suggest there can be many motives for such gifts other than pure, unselfish love. The structure of the tax system is one: many people much prefer to direct the disposition of their own wealth and not to leave it to the tender mercies of government bureaucrats, so they wish to choose the objects of their involuntary bounty as they themselves see fit.

They then take tax deductions for these gifts and so reduce their overall tax burden. The net effect is that they are out of pocket by so much as they have given away but they would anyway have been out of pocket by a significant amount had they paid taxes on their full incomes without the benefit of those deductions.

Without the carrot of the tax deduction and the stick of the marginal tax rates, these “gifts” might well never have been made. As it is, they proceeded from the urge to exert control, not from any sacrificial love for their recipients.

Then, too, people sometimes give to what we call “charities” such as art museums, symphony societies, or opera guilds, because that is a way of getting recognition in certain social circles or because it is expected of them and they are afraid, or at least embarrassed, not to fulfill those expectations.

None of those gifts really proceeds from love, does it? And while the money is just as useful to the “charity” that receives it when it is given for selfish or social reasons as it is when it is given out of true charity, it is only these latter gifts that can actually provide their givers with any real satisfaction.

So this is why St. Paul says, “If I give away all that I have, ... but have not love, I gain nothing.” This love that must