

fashion, matrimony is a constant unfolding of God’s loving provision for our needs, physical, mental, and spiritual. Truly, Matrimony, like Baptism and Confirmation, is a Sacrament, the graces of which are constantly working in the lives of those of us who are so fortunate as to have experienced them.

And now, unto God ✕ the Father, God ✕ the Son, and God ✕ the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

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¹ This was originally written as a sermon on the Epistle for Mass for the Feast of the Epiphany, 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 38 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxx (CIPBC 1963).

³ Exodus 34:1-10 (KJV).

⁴ Numbers 6:22-end (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 40:12-end (KJV).

⁶ Ephesians 3:1-end (KJV).

⁷ Ephesians 3:3 & 5b (RSV).

⁸ Acts 9:3-9.

⁹ THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 577 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 581.

¹¹ St. John 3:14-17. *See, also*, St. Luke 19:10; Romans 3:23-25; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:4-6.

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

Trinity Sunday

I. Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest. And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount. And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount.

“And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O LORD, let my LORD, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.

“And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.”

Or,

Here beginneth the twenty-second Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Fourth Book of Moses, called Numbers.⁴

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Or,

Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fortieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁵

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed [SHOWD] to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

“To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall

pens to be my and my wife’s wedding anniversary. Just as the Christ child received gifts from the wise men, I have received many gifts from this marriage.

Some of those gifts I have received from that Sacrament are obvious: no one who has met our son, Jack, can ever forget him, and every ACC congregation with which we have been associated has benefited from Debbie’s steady work and support, often as a Vestrywoman and always as a participant in any activities that the parish puts on.

Others of these gifts are not so obvious, however. One that has particularly struck me in connection with this wedding anniversary is, in many ways, akin to “natural Revelation”. No one who has ever been married will have any difficulty in understanding the many, many ways that being married affects every area of our daily lives, in fact, every area of our very beings. And for me, one of the most important of those ways is the manner in which this daily experience of another very special person, united to me in Christ, continually brings me closer to God.

IV. Conclusion:

This is something we often overlook in the business of everyday life, in coping with all the multitude of things that seemingly just have to get done between awakening in the morning and going to sleep in the evening. But it is a real facet of that Sacrament we call Matrimony. One’s spouse is, quite literally, a gift to one from God and is given to one as part of God’s plan for one’s *perfection*, that is, for one’s spiritual improvement, for one’s progress toward being all that one can, spiritually, be.

One of the graces of parenthood is the way it brings us a much clearer and more urgent understanding of what Scripture means when it tells us that God gave His only-begotten Son that we might be saved.¹¹ In somewhat similar

However, there are also other forms of Revelation, both direct and indirect, of which we should always be conscious. Whenever God reaches out to us to make Himself known to us, it behooves us to pay attend to Him and to what He wishes us to know. For example, one of the most prominent indirect forms of Revelation that theologians traditionally recognized is called “natural revelation”. This means the way we can recognize the handiwork of God in the order and arrangement of the natural world around us.

Another one of those forms of Revelation, and one which we tend to forget *is* actually Revelation, occurs in the Sacraments of the Church. To understand how this is so, let us take a moment to review what a Sacrament is.

The Catechism⁹ defines a Sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us”.¹⁰ That word “given” is, in Latin, *gratia*, from which we derive the English word “grace”, and so we customarily speak of God’s gift to us in the Sacraments as “God’s grace”. But what is this “grace” or “gift”?

Simply put, it is God’s *presence*. What God gives us in His Sacraments is Himself, His presence with us. That is how the Sacraments draw us closer to Him, strengthen us—for how could anything strengthen us more than God’s presence does?—and so assist us to *perfect* ourselves, that is, to make ourselves more fit to be in the presence of God.

Each of the Sacraments recognized by the Church has this same effect: in some way, it brings to us the actual presence of God. Even if we are not consciously aware of that presence, surely it must have some transforming effect on us, so each time we receive the grace of one of the Sacraments, that receiving is, in fact, one kind of epiphany for us.

I was thinking about this because the Feast of the Epiphany, which is referred to in this Second Lesson, hap-

not be moved. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith [SETH] the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁶

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote

afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[T]he mystery was made known to me by revelation... as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit...”⁷ In the Name of the ✠ Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the ✠ Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

III. Introduction, Theme, and Development:

Tonight’s Second Lesson happens to include the verses that comprise the Epistle appointed for Mass on Twelfth Night, that is, the Feast of the Epiphany. The Epiphany, of course, is our celebration of the showing of the Christ child to the Persian wise men. The word “Epiphany” means “A revelatory manifestation of a divine being”, so an epiphany, such as the showing of the Christ child to the representatives of the non-Jewish nations, *is* a form of God’s Revelation of Himself to mankind.

St. Paul’s words, that I have chosen in somewhat disconnected fashion as a text for this Sermon, likewise deal with the subject of *Revelation*, that is, with how God conveys information to us. Obviously, in the context of Paul’s message to the Ephesians, he was speaking of a very direct form of Revelation, especially that which takes place through the medium of specially-inspired prophets, Apostles, or others of God’s authorized agents.

Paul himself, at least in his rôle as an Apostle, was a product of an epiphany, in the form of Christ’s famous appearance to him on the road to Damascus.⁸ Indeed, Paul’s vision of Our Lord and his resulting conversion, from persecutor of the Christian Faith into the Apostle and evangelist *par excellence* of that same Faith, have ever since been the stock example of an epiphany.