

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER**  
**The Vigil of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple,**  
**commonly called**  
**The Vigil of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary<sup>1</sup>**  
**(February 1)**

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

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the thirteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.<sup>3</sup>

“And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites [**KAY-nunn-ights**], as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD’s. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.

“And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh [**FAY-roe**] would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Galatians:<sup>4</sup>

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba [**AH-buh**], Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Epistle: “[W]hen the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”<sup>5</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Introduction and Theme:**

There are two main reasons that St. Paul’s arguments in his Epistles are often difficult for modern readers to follow. One is that he often used allegorical methods of interpreting Scripture that were common among the rabbis of his day but that are virtually unknown today, at least to modern Christians. The other is that, quite reasonably, he often referred to social institutions that were common in his day but that are either unknown or, at least, rare, in our time.

Today’s Epistle is an example of that second sort of difficulty: Paul’s point is made by reference to social practices that, in part, are nonexistent in our society and, in part, to others

---

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 4:7 (RSV).

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 5:16 (KJV); *cf.* Exodus 20:12 (KJV).

<sup>13</sup> Priest-in-Charge, Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune, MS; Honorary Canon, The Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.

which, if they persist at all among us, persist only among the extremely wealthy.

### **Development:**

The practice that St. Paul cites that is no longer known to us is the complete power that fathers in the ancient world exercised over their children. Usually referred to by the Latin legal term, *patria potestas*, or “power of the father”, that power extended even to putting the child to death if the father deemed it desirable. In our society, in contrast, parents have the power of disciplining their children but that power is limited by the power of the state, acting as *parens patriæ* or “parent of the people”, which can limit or forbid parents from imposing on their children those punishments that the state deems excessive.

It is because of this *patria potestas* that Paul is able to say, “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate....”<sup>6</sup> Even the eldest son, destined—if he lived—to inherit the family’s entire patrimony, had, during his minority, no personal rights. He was, as Paul said, “no better than a slave”.

This brings us to another institution, one that has survived in part but has also been extinguished in part. That is the tutorship or guardianship of a child whose father died before that child attained his majority. In our world, the state establishes the age of majority and it applies equally to all children; all that any parent can do, and only a few bother to do, is to delay that child’s inheritance of property by means of some sort of testamentary trust.

It is this to which Paul refers when he says, “but he [that is, the child] is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.”<sup>7</sup> So our children enjoy full legal rights when they reach the age of 18 or 21 or whatever has been established as the age of full adulthood but ancient children did not receive their emancipation until their fathers gave it to them.

It is with a metaphor drawn from these social and legal facts, well known to all in his audience, that Paul makes his point to the Galatians. “So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe.”<sup>8</sup> Our corrupted human nature, in a state of nature unable to resist the lures of concupiscence—that is, of the natural “lusts of the body”—is the slave of its passions and passing physical temptations, just as a minor child of that era was the slave of its parents.

However, Paul continues, there is a cure for our state of slavery to sin, akin to the emancipation the minor child will eventually receive from the strictures of its parents: “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”<sup>9</sup>

In other words, when we are incorporated in Christ, we are adopted as sons of God and, thereby, become adult subjects of His, responsible for our own choices and behaviors. We are thus emancipated from our bondage to sin and fleshly lusts in the same way that a young adult is, upon his emancipation, freed from the bonds of his minority and tutorship.

This intimate, familial nature of our new, Christian relationship with God is only made possible by Our Lord’s Incarnation, followed by His death and sacrifice for us. So when we are incorporated into Him by baptism and the declaration of faith, these words of St. Paul’s become true for us, as they did for the Galatians: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”<sup>10</sup>—that is, quite literally, “crying ‘Daddy!’”

Paul continues with his explanation of the effects of this new relationship of parent and child: “So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.”<sup>11</sup> An heir, of course, is a real member of the family, who has real

rights and expectations by virtue of his status, not just some subject or associate subject who can expect no more than he is able to bribe some political boss to grant him.

### **Conclusion:**

However, this new family relationship with God is not entirely simple and is certainly not undemanding of us. For if God is now to be truly Our Father, as in the Lord’s Prayer and the three historic Creeds we claim He is, then we, in turn, are obligated to apply to Him at least as much devotion and respect as we are required to give to our earthly parents.

And the minimum requirement for that regard is set forth all too clearly in the Fifth Commandment: “Honour thy father... as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee...”<sup>12</sup>

That should be a sobering reflection. For, as we sit here today, can any one of us truthfully say that he or she honors our heavenly Father as fully and completely as He, who sent His Son to be born among us and then to die for us, actually deserves?

—oo0oo—

The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister, JD<sup>13</sup>  
December 30, 2012

---

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after Christmas, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Lessons Proper for Holy Days not included in the Foregoing Table*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlvi (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 13:11-16 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 4:1-7 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 4:4-5 (RSV).

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 4:1 (RSV).

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 4:2 (RSV).

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 4:3 (RSV).

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 4:4-5 (RSV).

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 4:6 (RSV).