

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday in Lent¹
(Year I)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the first Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“... Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] treasure cities, Pithom [**PIE-thahm**] and Raamses [**ray-AM-sees**]. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.

“... And Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

“And there went a man of the house of Levi [**LEE-vie**], and took to wife a daughter of Levi [**LEE-vie**]. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river’s side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she

sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's [FAY-roze] daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's [FAY-roze] daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's [FAY-roze] daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's [FAY-roze] daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-first Verse of the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁴

"And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

"And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus [zah-KAY-uss], which was the chief among the publicans,⁵ and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the

faith through the Gospel and to thy table in worship. Give us a discerning mind to follow those paths which are the most productive for thy kingdom, Lord. This we ask of thy divine guidance, O Lord. *Amen.*

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February 10, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Quinquagesima Sunday, 2013.

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (Anglican Church of Canada, 1962).

³ Exodus 1:8-14, 22—2:10 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 18:35—19:10 (KJV).

⁵ *I.e.*, contractors for "public works", specifically, in the case of occupied Palestine, tax farmers who bid for the right to collect the province's taxes by promising a guaranteed revenue to the Roman treasury.

⁶ St. Luke 18:35-39 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 15:25. (KJV).

⁸ I Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV).

⁹ *I.e.*, The Diocese of New Orleans of The Anglican Catholic Church.

¹⁰ St. Matthew 22:36-38 (KJV), quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 (KJV), together with St. Luke 10:26-28 (KJV), which form "The Summary of the Law", THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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If we believe this affirmation, then surely we would have our neighbors, friends, and family, know and enjoy the same love, security and salvation of Jesus Christ that we know. If we would have them know the same peace, then we must take an active part in bringing the message to them in the form of the Gospel, and bringing them to the living celebration of that message which is the Holy Eucharist. Father Windham's email went on to describe some of what his parish is doing to share that message in its community. St. Michael's¹¹ is participating in an examination of what it means to be a Christian, and how the Anglican Catholic Church exemplifies that objective.

Other parishes take different approaches to accomplish the same goal. St. Peter's Church¹² sponsors a nursing home ministry. Others, such as Holy Angels, Picayune, Mississippi, also take part in ministry to the elderly and shut-ins. Each and every project that we take on must be the product of a prayerful examination of how we can spread the word to the entire world as we are charged to do. We cannot rest on just having a building with a sign outside and a worship service inside. We must take the next step.

Remember that we are the servants of the nobleman in the parable who was ready for the marriage feast and sent his servants into the streets to bring guests to the dinner. We are still in Lent, and as we prepare for our time of introspection and self-evaluation, let's all remember to be in prayer for the health of our diocese, our church and our nation.

Let us be the squeaky wheel of prayer, continuously raised. Let us not ever "let it go", but rather remain ever devoted to our faith, our Church and our God and continuously be active in that devotion through prayer, and fasting and action.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, have mercy on us, thou Son of David. Guide us now in thy ways. Inspire in us wisdom to bring others to thy

press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus [zah-KAY-uss], make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus [zah-KAY-uss] stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "*And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*"⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

"Why must you go on and on and on about that? Can't you just let it go?"

How many of you have at one time or another been told you should quit talking about something that moved you deeply? How many have been cautioned that they should be quiet and just accept things as they are?

It is said that the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and it could as well be said that he or she who continues to insist on telling the Good News will earn not grease, but the salve of salvation. Those who continue to call upon Jesus Christ as their savior may find opposition from the world, but they will earn eternal rewards.

This theme of remaining true to essential truth and not being dissuaded by those who would silence you is one oft-repeated not only in Scripture, but in literature and philosophy. Just last week, we heard the parable tale told by our Lord of the seed that falls either on good ground, where it can grow and flourish, or in less hospitable places where it may spring up, but it soon withers and dies. We never want to be that short-lived vine, but the strong, healthy vine that continues to grow, to flourish and to produce good fruit.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, we read of a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus to beg Him to heal her daughter. When He initially declined, pointing out that He was first to minister to the Jews, she persisted in calling upon Him to help her. She did not give up, nor did she shrink from the initial rejection, but she continued to push forward in faith: "*Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*"⁷ At her entreaties, Jesus was moved to help her and granted her request that her daughter be cured of a devil.

St. Paul later admonished the Thessalonians to "Pray without ceasing."⁸ He told them to pray not for a short time, not just until the issue at hand is resolved, but without ceasing. Remember what prayer is. Prayer is the reflection of an ongoing relationship. It is our side in a continuing discussion between ourselves and God. It is part of our response to a loving, forgiving Savior. Prayer is our chance to express our own hopes, concerns, joys, disappointments, fears and exultations.

Prayer is not a dead recitation of beautiful words written in a book, words that have no real connection to our world. It is a living, breathing, ever-changing dynamic in our relationship, and therefore should always reflect that which is important, current and meaningful to us. Our Lord speaks to us through His creation and His Gospels. We speak to Him in our prayers.

This idea came fortuitously to me just before I received several emails this week from fellow clergy around our diocese. Father Pete Windham, of St. Michael's, Panama City, Florida, sent out an email containing some thoughts in preparation for our upcoming Diocesan Synod and Electoral Synod, at which we will attempt to discern who the Holy Spirit may be calling to be the next Bishop Ordinary of this diocese.⁹ Obviously, this is a time for deep reflection upon our current states, spiritual, financial, and administrative.

Father Windham laments what he sees as the "unhealthy" spiritual state of our diocese, which he sees as being rooted in our lack of Christian commitment. He questions what we must do to heal our diocese, and to attract people into our pews and to our faith. How, he asks, can we be, the Church that our Lord wants us to be?

As he notes, our liturgy and our message are sound. Sadly, however, only a few of us assist at that liturgy or hear that message, and that number will remain small until we remember that our Faith is about relationships and we start to act on that reality. We are called to be a family, and the family extends far further than we can even imagine.

Remember the words of our Lord: "*Thou shall 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 shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"¹⁰