

**SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER<sup>1</sup>**  
**St. Bartholomew<sup>2</sup>**  
**(August 24)**

**Lessons:<sup>3</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the sixty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>4</sup>

“Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

“... For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish [TARR-shish], Pul [PULL], and Lud [LEWD], that draw the bow, to Tubal [TYOO-bull], and Javan [JAY-vann], to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith [SETH] the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites [LEE-vights], saith [SETH] the LORD. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith [SETH] the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith [SETH] the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the First Epistle General of Blessed Peter the Apostle.<sup>5</sup>

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the Second Lesson: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”*<sup>6</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

of those addressed as “thee,” for whom Christ Himself interceded, whose faith did not fail, and who, to this day, strengthen their brethren.

We cannot afford the luxury of ignorance about Satan’s devices. He still goes about as a roaring lion, and it takes real humility to resist him. It takes, also, steadfastness in the faith. Some things never change, so it is up to us to learn wisdom. Humble yourselves, and also be steadfast in the faith.

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The Rev’d Robert Hart<sup>17</sup>  
July 10, 2011

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<sup>1</sup> “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>2</sup> This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the Third Sunday after Trinity.

<sup>3</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 66:1-2, 18-23 (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> I Peter 5:1-11 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> I Peter 5:8-9 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> St. Matthew 16:18.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., St. Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>9</sup> I Corinthians 10:16.

<sup>10</sup> I Peter 5:5 (KJV).

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 13:17.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 13:7.

<sup>13</sup> Malachi 2:7.

<sup>14</sup> St. Luke 22:24.

<sup>15</sup> St. Luke 22:31,32 (KJV).

<sup>16</sup> II Corinthians 2:10-11.

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was singular. We have lost this in the contemporary English language, and the loss is a loss for Bible translation. Know this: In both the King James Bible and in the Book of Common Prayer, the words beginning with “Y”—you, yours, ye—are addressed always to more than one person. “Satan hath desired to have you” meant that he desired to have all of the twelve Apostles. But, in His next words Jesus spoke specifically to Peter, for the “Th” words are always addressed only to one individual (for He did not say the same about Judas), that is to Peter: “*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*”

When this Apostle, all those years later, wrote this Epistle to the Church (that is, to you and me, to the Church in every generation and place), warning us of the Devil like a roaring lion, he could look back on the night when the same Devil desired to have all of the Apostles to sift them as wheat. Do not think times have changed so much; at least, do not think that way about spiritual warfare. Satan still goes about as a roaring lion, and it still takes the combination of humility and *steadfastness in the faith* to resist his attacks.

Think of these words by St. Paul: “*To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*”<sup>16</sup>

But, today the Church is ignorant of Satan’s devices. One of the tragedies of our Continuing churches is the disproportionate number of people, in far too many cases even of clergy, who proved themselves ignorant of Satan’s devices. Instead of looking like the powerful Apostles on the Day of Pentecost and after, some of them approached God’s altar the same way the pre-Pentecost Apostles sat at table, arguing over which should be accounted the greatest—who might have the purplest shirt and the mightiest miter. Satan desired to have them also, to sift them as wheat. Thank God for all of the individuals, all

## Homily:

As soon as St. Peter tells us to humble ourselves, in the context of being subject one to another, he launches into this warning and reminder that we are in state of war. Spiritual warfare is a reality all too easy to forget, because it involves what we cannot see, an invisible yet very real enemy. Some passages remind us that we are commanded to put up an offence and to attack strongholds (“the gates of Hell” suggests that it is the enemy camp that must put up the greater defense).<sup>7</sup> This is especially so of every passage wherein the Lord gives us the Great Commission.<sup>8</sup> But, here Peter warns us to be on the defensive against attacks by Satan and his minions, defeated though they may be.

The humility of which Peter speaks has everything to do with our fellowship with one another in the Church. Christian fellowship is not merely a social “fellowship.” It is a lifeline we extend to one another in times of peril; it is mutual support in a war effort; it is care for those in need. The same word for “fellowship” is also the Greek word translated as “communion” when speaking of the Sacrament: “*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*”<sup>9</sup> (The word is κοινῶν (koinōnia) [**koy-known-EE-ah**]). Our fellowship with one another is more than social; it is sacramental.

When we face the reality of spiritual warfare, we must recall the fellowship of the Church, the Body of Christ, as the living, real and vital communion of saints both living and departed (or militant and triumphant) to which we belong by virtue of baptism, that is, by being in Christ. To withstand the assaults of the invisible enemy, assaults on our minds above all else, we begin by having an attitude that makes us subject one to another.

Today's Second Lesson says: "*Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*"<sup>10</sup> The elder is the πρεσβύτερος (*presbyteros*) [**prez-BOOT-er-ohs**], from which the English word "priest" evolved. This verse makes it clear that the elder is a man ordained, who must care for your souls, not just an older man. Here it is from the top, verse one:

*"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elders...."*

Frankly, there was no word for "laity" exactly. What Peter is saying is the same as what the writer to the Hebrews said: "*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*"<sup>11</sup> Earlier, in that chapter, they are identified as those "*who have spoken unto you the word of God.*"<sup>12</sup>

In other words, obedience must be given to the word of God. Also, the elder is responsible to speak the word of God, not to be a dictator or to impose his own desires. As the prophet Malachi put it, "*For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*"<sup>13</sup> Before the charge to be subject one to another, we find the charge to hear what the elder or priest is saying by the word of God as the messenger of the Lord. Everyone is called to humility if we hear the whole context, including the men who must rule (which means care for)

the church without taking the attitude of being lords over God's people.

Now, the simple fact is that our adversary the Devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The context suggests to us that without humility each one of us would be in great danger. It is not enough simply to be free of an overwhelming ego, and not enough to *feel* humble. Safety requires us to get back to the meaning of fellowship, or communion, with one another in the Church in an attitude of being subject one to another; at the very least it means a willingness to hear more than to speak. It means humility to learn and to hear.

Peter spoke from life experience. He was among the Apostles both before and after the great events of Christ's resurrection appearances to them, and both before and after Pentecost. He could remember a time when they understood very little, so that "*the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed*" girded Himself in a towel and washed the feet of His disciples to teach them humility. For, they had gone into this most sacred of feasts arguing among themselves about which of them should be accounted the greatest.<sup>14</sup>

Peter could look back on that, and remember his boastful pride: "*Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*" In His own faithfulness to His Apostles, Jesus spoke of events to come, and of their real significance. Peter could well remember, therefore, the Lord turning to him and saying deep and profound words that would only later take hold of him, when pride in his own strength was exhausted and gone:

*"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."*<sup>15</sup>

I have quoted the King James Bible (1611), in which the word "you" was a plural word, and in which the word "thee"