
SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER¹
The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the third Chapter of the second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have

¹¹ Hebrews 13:7.

¹² Malachi 2:7.

¹³ St. Luke 22:24.

¹⁴ St. Luke 22:31,32 (KJV).

¹⁵ II Corinthians 2:10-11.

¹⁶ Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the First Epistle General of Blessed Peter the Apostle.⁴

“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 suf-

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”¹⁵

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 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 Hart¹⁶
July 10, 2011

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the Third Sunday after Trinity.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Exodus 3:1-15 (KJV).

⁴ I Peter 5:1-11 (KJV).

⁵ I Peter 5:8-9 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 16:18.

⁷ *E.g.*, St. Matthew 28:18-20.

⁸ I Corinthians 10:16.

⁹ I Peter 5:5 (KJV).

¹⁰ Hebrews 13:17.

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.”*¹⁴

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

fered 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.”*⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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).⁶ This is especially so of every passage wherein the Lord gives us the Great Commission.⁷ 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?”⁸ (The word is κοινωνία (*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.*”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ Earlier, in that chapter, they are identified as those “*who have spoken unto you the word of God.*”¹¹

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.*”¹² 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.¹³

Peter could look back on that, and remember his boastful pride: “*Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison,*