

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-fourth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁴

“Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith [**SETH**] the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun [**dgeh-SHOE-runn**], whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith [**SETH**] the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew [**SHOW**] unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

“ ...

“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁵

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth [SHOW-eth] mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ... For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same

by oneself, in one’s own living room, when no other member of the Christian community is present.

—oo0oo—

The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister JD¹⁵
January 13, 2013

¹ “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 viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, 2013.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (PECUSA 1928, revised 1943).

⁴ Isaiah 44:1-8, 21-23 (KJV).

⁵ Romans 12:1-9 (KJV).

⁶ Romans 12:2, 4-5 (RSV).

⁷ This entire initial exposition is borrowed from *F. Davidson & Ralph P. Martin, Romans*, in HERBERT G. MAY & BRUCE M. METZGER, eds., THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA, REVISED STANDARD VERSION 1039-1040 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁸ Romans 12:5 (RSV).

⁹ Ephesians 4:4-6 (RSV).

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:12 (RSV).

¹¹ Ephesians 4:16 (RSV).

¹² Colossians 1:18a (RSV).

¹³ James 2:26 (RSV).

¹⁴ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 81 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁵ 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.

This theme recurs throughout the Church year, but is especially the subject of, for example, the Epiphany Season. God did not manifest Himself to the nations merely for our private delectation or solitary contemplation. He came to us, and made Himself known to us, for a very specific purpose. He did not come so that we could *feel* something, or so that we could *enjoy* something; He came so that we could *become* something and could *do* something.

Conclusion:

So, to continue my example, if I have truly experienced this Christian alteration, then instead of its being a completely inward and personal matter, it will be manifested outwardly in my manner of life with my fellow men and women. Most especially, it will be seen in my manner of life with those of my fellow men and women who have, along with me, accepted the graces God has offered us, declared our mutual Faith in Him, and have assembled ourselves together to adore Him and to offer Him what our Book of Common Prayer calls “the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”¹⁴

That “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” to which we refer in the Canon of Consecration is, quite literally, “making Eucharist”, for “Eucharist” is just the Greek word for “thanksgiving”. From the very first days of the Church, when those who were present with Our Lord at the Last Supper gathered to do what He had instructed them when He told them, “Do this in remembrance of me”, this “Great Thanksgiving” has been the act of the whole Christian congregation, joining together to re-present before God the Father the one Sacrifice of His Son once offered.

And thus it is, dearly beloved, that celebrating the Eucharist—this thing that Christ Himself ordered us to do in memory of Him—is something one simply cannot do alone,

function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

Today’s Second Lesson is the opening of a long discourse—slightly more than three chapters, in fact—in which Paul explains to the Romans what Christianity means in practice.⁷ The overall theme is that while true conversion to the new Faith requires both the acceptance of the facts of Our Lord’s mission to humanity and one’s personal declaration of allegiance to Him, those are the personal and internal dimensions of such a conversion.

Theme:

Equally as important as our faith commitments, however, are the external and social dimensions of that conversion. For Christianity is not merely a set of propositions to which individuals may—or may not—give intellectual assent, it is a communal endeavor in which the people of the Assembly—or as the Greeks called it, the *Ekklesia*, from which we get our English term the Church—these people deliberately choose to associate themselves together in a common life. They do so both for mutual support and assistance and to give a united witness to those around them of the changes of life they have experienced as a result of their Christian conversions.

Development:

In this connection, please note that when I read you in my text, “be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”, the English word “prove” has changed its meaning over the years. Today, it means “to establish by means of evidence” where it formerly meant “to

put to the test". Thus all firearms get their final safety tests at a "proof house" and, when they pass, are stamped with a "proof mark"; so, too, the common proverb, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". When we eat pudding, we are not establishing the truth of any proposition; we are putting the pudding to the test.

In other words, by renewing our minds, St. Paul says, we may test what is the will of God for us and, especially, we may test what, in our deportment and outward manner of life, conforms to that will.

It is significant that the very name of the new Christian community should be "the Assembly" or "the Gathering". This highly indicative name provides, among other things, one of the fundamental answers to those who say silly things like, "I don't need to go to church; I can pray to God just as well at home in my living room." Well, at home in one's living room one can pursue one's personal devotions, and every true Christian should certainly have a strong and lively personal prayer life. However, it is impossible to be a vibrant, contributing member of a community while at the same time staying away from the places where the other people of that community gather.

That necessity for us to be vibrant, contributing members of a community is why Paul tells the Romans, and so tells us, "[W]e, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."⁸

Throughout Paul's letters to his new churches, he uses the word "body" in two, related but different, senses. One is that which we have already discussed: a "body" of people is a group of people, but not a random group. It is made up of people who have some organic relationship among themselves; they have come together for some common purpose. Thus they are not a chance collection or a mob but an intentional community, a society.

Then Paul takes that same word and applies it metaphorically in another one of its senses: a "body", like a person's body or an animal's body, is a physical structure which has an inherent organic unity. In such a "body", each limb and each organ plays its own unique rôle in contributing to the health and well-being of the whole.

Thus Paul implies both of these senses simultaneously when he writes the Ephesians: "There is *one body* and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all."⁹ And, a bit later, he writes: "[E]quip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up *the body of Christ*..."¹⁰ And then again: "[*T*he *whole body*, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."¹¹

Similarly, he writes to the Colossians about how Our Lord constituted this metaphorical "body", this "Assembly", this "Gathering", this "Church": "He [Jesus Christ] is the head of *the body, the church*..."¹²

But Paul was not the only Apostle who saw these connections. For St. James, too, wrote in these same terms when he said: "[A]s *the body* apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."¹³

Thus, for one example, if I have truly converted from paganism to Christianity, if I have truly accepted Christ's gift to me of Himself so that I can transcend the limitations of my natural human self so as to become greater than that natural self, that is, to be transformed into a *supernatural* self, then this alteration will not be a wholly selfish, private change.