

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Thus saith [SETH] the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

“I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith [SETH] unto his father, What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have

stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith **[SETH]** the LORD of hosts. Thus saith **[SETH]** the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans **[sah-BEE-anz]**, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the ninth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.⁴

“... What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith **[SETH]** to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith **[SETH]** unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew **[SHOW]** my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew **[SHOW]** his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he

⁴ Romans 9:14-26 (KJV).

⁵ *I.e.*, Hosea.

⁶ Isaiah 45:1-3 (NIV 1984).

⁷ 1 Samuel 9:15-16.

⁸ 1 Samuel 10:1.

⁹ 1 Samuel 24:5-6.

¹⁰ *Cf.* Romans 13:1-7.

¹¹ Isaiah 45:4-6 (NIV 1984).

¹² 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

¹³ St. Matthew 22:17-21; St. Mark 12:14-17; St. Luke 20:22-25.

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:13-17 (NIV 1984).

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His followers to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's.¹³

Conclusion:

This is the Christian view of citizenship:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil: live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”¹⁴

Of course, there is an order of priorities among these duties. We are here commanded to “live as servants of God”, which we can do only so long as we follow God's commands to us. So if ever Cæsar should demand from us something that is contrary to what God demands from us – such as that we tolerate moral abominations such as the murder of unborn children – then we must render unto God and not to Cæsar, whatever may be the cost of that allegiance.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁵
January 19, 2011.

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

³ Isaiah 45:1-15 (KJV).

might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith [SETH] also in Osee⁵ [OH-zay], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson:

“This is what the LORD to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of
to subdue nations before him
and to strip kings of their armor,
to open door before him
so that gates will not be shut:
I will go before you
and will level the mountains;
I will break down gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.
I will give you the treasures of darkness,
riches stored in secret places,
so that you may know that I am the LORD,
the God of Israel, who summons you by name.”⁶

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

We Christians are accustomed to hear and to read references to “the Lord's anointed”, for that is the literal

English translation of the Hebrew *Meshiach* [**mesh-EYE-akh**], the word from which we get the term “Messiah”. However, for precisely that same reason, we are accustomed to hear this title only in connection with Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and not with other Old or New Testament figures.

Yet here is the great prophet Isaiah, telling ancient Israel that the Persian emperor, Cyrus – who was not even a Jew, but instead a Zoroastrian or fire-worshipper – was the Lord’s anointed one! How, then, can this be?

To begin with, remember the account of how God called Saul to be the first King of Israel. In the first book of Samuel we are told how the Lord told Samuel that He would reveal to him the man whom the Lord had chosen to be King over Israel and, when He had given that revelation, Saul was to anoint that man with oil.⁷ Then the Lord sent Saul to Samuel, and Samuel did as the Lord had commanded him and poured oil on Saul as a sign of his commissioning as the Lord’s servant.⁸

This anointing was the mark of kingship and gave Saul something of a sacred character, so that later, even after Saul had sought to murder David, and for other reasons God had transferred the kingship from Saul to David, David would not lift his hand to do violence to the one whom the Lord had directed be anointed.⁹

It is in this generic sense of kingship authorized by God, for the benefit of mankind, that Isaiah refers to Cyrus, the great King of Kings of Mesopotamia, as the Lord’s anointed. And it was not even necessary that Cyrus himself either recognize or acknowledge the divine nature of his mission for him to be, both *de jure et de facto*, the servant of God.¹⁰ Just listen to the words of Isaiah as he continues from the point where our text left off:

““For the sake of Jacob my servant,
of Israel my chosen,
I summon you by name
and bestow on you a title of honor,
though you do not acknowledge me.
I am the LORD and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God.
I will strengthen you,
though you have not acknowledged me,
so that from the rising of the sun
to the place of its setting
men may know there is none besides me.
I am the Lord, and there is no other.””¹¹

So it was the Lord Himself who told Isaiah to confer on the unwitting Cyrus the title of “the Lord’s anointed”, because Cyrus, will-he, nill-he, was going to be doing the Lord’s will by casting down lesser kings whom God had appointed for destruction.

This tradition has lasted down to our own times. So, in 1953, when Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain was formally crowned, she, like the long line of British monarchs before her, was also anointed with Sacred Chrism in a manner very similar to that used in the ordinations of priests and bishops.

Secular rulers have their place in God’s plan because they maintain the public peace and order without which ordinary people cannot go about their daily lives – including their regular rounds of worship – in security.¹² The efficient government of the Roman Empire, with its postal system, its well-maintained network of roads, its army garrisons that protected travelers from highwaymen and brigands, and its navy that kept the sea lanes free of pirates, created the conditions that permitted the nascent Christian Church to take root and flourish. It is for this reason that Our Lord commanded