

Sermon for Morning Prayer
St. John the Evangelist

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the thirty-third Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.²

“And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.”
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Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twentieth Verse of the thirteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“... Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon....

“Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.”⁴

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

¹² Exodus 33: 7-11.

¹³ Exodus 33: 14 (KJV).

¹⁴ St. John 13: 23 (KJV).

¹⁵ St. John 13: 25.

¹⁶ “Synoptic” is from a Greek term meaning “with the same eye”, *i.e.*, sharing the same viewpoint.

¹⁷ Jones, *op. cit.* at 927.

¹⁸ After St. Paul, only the second one whose writings have survived.

¹⁹ Jones, *op. cit.* at 928.

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Homily:

Today’s First Lesson is taken from the latter part of the thirty-third Chapter of Exodus, which itself is the middle portion of three Chapters, 32, 33, and 34, which form one connected account near the end of the book of Exodus. In fact, they form the penultimate, or last-but-one, section of that book.

Here, near the end of Exodus, we read of the apostasy of the people of Israel after they first accepted,⁵ and then broke,⁶ their covenant with God while Moses was absent on Mount Sinai to commune God on its behalf. Then they worshipped Aaron’s creation with the orgiastic rites⁷ that were characteristic of the pagan cults of that time and place.

When God told Moses the people, too impatient to wait for his return, had prevailed on Aaron to make them a pagan idol in the form of a golden calf, and threatened to abandon them in their apostasy and to raise up another people under Moses, Moses prayed to God, interceding for them and begging God’s forbearance and forgiveness for their sin.⁸

Moses then descended to the Israelites’ camp and destroyed that idol and put the pagan worshippers to the sword, in order to purge the people of their sin against the covenant.⁹ After thus purging the company of the evidences of its apostasy, he ascended the mountain a second time, to intercede with God on the people’s behalf so as to restore the covenant they had broken.¹⁰ He even offered his own death to redeem them in God’s sight,¹¹ making him a *type* of Our Lord who would come with the inauguration of the New Testament dispensation.

Later, God and Moses resumed their colloquy, this time in the tabernacle¹² that accompanied the people on their way and that was erected anew each time they pitched camp. It was this meeting, at which Moses pled with the Lord to restore the people to His favor and to accompany them on their journey

toward Canaan [KEH-nuh-ann], that was the occasion for the passage that forms today's First Lesson.

Moses' pleas were successful and the covenant with God was restored. As Moses asked, God promised He would accompany the Israelites: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."¹³ Indeed, although Moses never knew this during his own lifetime, he was successful even beyond what he could have imagined, for God not only continued to be present with His chosen people, but later expanded and improved upon the manner of that presence when He came among them in a unique and unprecedented way in the Incarnation.

The earthly presence of that incarnate Lord occupied a mere thirty years or so, of which only about three were spent in the active teaching ministry that is recorded in the Gospels. In today's Second Lesson, we are near the end of those three years, on the very eve of Our Lord's betrayal, a mere day before His condemnation and execution.

Tradition holds that the disciple who was "leaning on Jesus' bosom . . . , whom Jesus loved",¹⁴ and who asked Jesus the identity of the one who would betray Him,¹⁵ was one of the four Evangelists who recorded the events of those three years' ministry, the one whose Feast this is, St. John.

Conclusion:

Most of the surviving *facts* of Jesus' ministry, although by no means all, are recorded in one or another of the three so-called "synoptic"¹⁶ Gospels, that is, by Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke. However, without St. John, we would have little information about Jesus' "Jerusalem ministry" because the others concentrate on His "Galilean ministry".¹⁷

The most important difference between the three "synoptics" on the one hand, and St. John, on the other, is that the "synoptic" Evangelists largely, although not exclusively, relate

facts, leaving the reader to draw from those facts the necessary conclusions. St. John, however, is one of the earliest theologians in the Church,¹⁸ usually giving us in express terms the meanings of those events he found important enough to have recorded.

Of those various meanings, for the explanation of which we are indebted to St. John, probably the single most important one is his constant recognition of Our Lord as "the Son of God".¹⁹

This is the final culmination of Moses' pleas of intercession with God on behalf of the Israelites. As God promised to be present with His chosen people on their wanderings, so He remained present with the settled Hebrews in their Temple, and now He abides with us, the people of the New Israel, through His only-begotten Son, of whom St. John the Evangelist so often wrote.

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xii (PECUSA 1928, 1943).

² Exodus 33: 12-23 (KJV).

³ St. John 13: 20-26, 31-35 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 13: 31 (KJV).

⁵ Exodus 19: 7-25.

⁶ Exodus 32: 1-10.

⁷ Exodus 32: 6, 19, and 25. As the references to naked dancing make clear, in the verse "And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play", "play" is a euphemism. Cf. Hywel R. Jones, *Exodus*, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, EDS., THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED 3rd ed. 137 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1970).

⁸ Exodus 32: 7-10.

⁹ Exodus 32: 19-29.

¹⁰ Exodus 32: 30-35.

¹¹ Exodus 32:32.