

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Twenty-First Sunday After Trinity

I. Lessons:¹

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the third Chapter of Baruch.²

“... Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is understanding; that thou mayest know also where is length of days, and life, where is the light of the eyes, and peace. Who hath found out her place? or who hath come into her treasures? ... Who hath gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? Who hath gone over the sea, and found her, and will bring her for pure gold? No man knoweth her way, nor thinketh of her path. But he that knoweth all things knoweth her, and hath found her out with his understanding: he that prepared the earth for evermore hath filled it with fourfooted beasts: He that sendeth forth light, and it goeth, calleth it again, and it obeyeth him with fear. The stars shined in their watches, and rejoiced: when he calleth them, they say, Here we be; and so with cheerfulness they shewed light unto him that made them. This is our God, and there shall none other be accounted of in comparison of him. He hath found out all the way of knowledge, and hath given it unto Jacob his servant, and to Israel his beloved. Afterward did he shew himself upon earth, and conversed with men.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

B. The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.³

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made

manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

“The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

“They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that

he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the First Lesson:

"This is our God;
no other can be compared to him!
He found the whole way to knowledge,
and gave her to Jacob his servant,

and to Israel whom he loved.
Afterward she appeared upon earth
And lived among men.”⁴

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

III. Introduction, Theme and Development:

Within the past week, a media firestorm⁵ has raged in Belgium, which is arguably Europe’s second most advanced example of moral decay, second only to the Netherlands in its devotion to what Pope Benedict XVI has called “the culture of death”. This “culture of death” is marked not just by official toleration but by official promotion of abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, and a whole host of dehumanizing and crass forms of moral degeneracy.

The cries of outrage have swirled around the head of the man who is widely viewed as the most conservative, that is, orthodox, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church in Belgium. For example, he has been an outspoken critic of the Roman Church’s formerly lax handling of the clerical sex abuse crisis; as one article wrote, “Belgian Archbishop Andre Joseph [**LAY-uhn-arhd**] sharply criticized the church for choosing to protect ‘the reputation of certain men of the church over the honor of the abused children.’ He said the church can only regain its dignity and trust ‘by declaring the truth.’”⁶

The most heartening feature of the current dispute is that, thanks to that same Pope Benedict XVI, this orthodox prelate has, since January, 2010, been the head of the Roman Catholic Church there. He is the Most Reverend André Joseph Léonard [**LAY-uhn-arhd**], the Archbishop of Mechelen [**MEKH-eh-lenn**]-Brussels and Roman Catholic Primate of Belgium.

⁶ Helen Kennedy, *On Easter, Catholic bishops slam church leaders, as Pope is mum on Pedophile scandal*, NYDailyNews.com, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/2010/04/04/2010-04-04_pope_prays_for_peace_on_easter_remains_silent_on_growing_pedophile_scandal.html.

⁷ *Baruch* 3: 36 (RSV).

⁸ *Dick, op. cit.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *The Collect Of a Bishop, The Common of Saints, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* 366 (South Africa 1954).

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these same criticisms resurfaced when Léonard's [LAY-uhn-arhdz] appointment to the Primacy was announced, at which time he reiterated his earlier teaching, adding, "Homosexuality is not the same as normal sex in the same way that anorexia is not a normal appetite."¹¹

V. Conclusion:

The Belgians, and the rest of us, too, need to hear these words of simple reason. So let us give thanks to God for faithful Bishops who, in the words of today's First Lesson, have found out all the way of knowledge and so have learned where is wisdom, where is strength, and where is understanding. Let us likewise give thanks for those who, like Archbishop Léonard [LAY-uhn-arhd], fearlessly stand forth to proclaim that knowledge, wisdom, and understanding:

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Lord, who hast encouraged thy Church by thy faithful bishop and confessor, André-Joseph: Grant unto us that, thankfully remembering his example, we too may learn to overcome the world and to glorify thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*¹²

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister, J.D.¹³
October 24, 2010.

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

² *Baruch* 3: 14-15, 29-37 (KJV).

³ *St. John* 9: 1-38 (KJV).

⁴ *Baruch* 3: 35-37 (RSV).

⁵ *John A. Dick, Protest, disbelief follow Belgian archbishop's AIDS statements*, National Catholic Reporter, <http://ncronline.org/news/global/protest-disbelief-follow-belgium-archbishops-aids-statements>, October 18, 2010.

The howls of anger at Archbishop Léonard [LAY-uhn-arhd] are probably all the louder because he, who was widely regarded as the most orthodox Bishop in Belgium, is the successor as Primate to Cardinal Godfried Danneels, who was for more than thirty years very possibly the most liberal and unorthodox Roman Catholic leader in all of Europe. Assisted by Cardinal Danneels' trenchant neglect of basic Catholic doctrine, not only have Belgian politicians and social engineers been able to break down respect for human life in this formerly heavily Roman Catholic country but church attendance has fallen precipitously and clerical vocations have declined to negligibility.

So why is it that Archbishop Léonard [LAY-uhn-arhd] is now the target of so much criticism from the chattering classes? Perhaps it is enough that I told you that he is a renowned upholder of the traditional Faith and that he replaced an infamous destroyer of that Faith; after that, you can easily see that the seeds of controversy were planted at the time of his enthronement, destined to sprout at some time, probably sooner rather than later. Thus the specific details of the issues which have so upset the molders of Belgian opinion should scarcely matter.

Nevertheless, the actual issues in dispute which have taken up so much media time and attention are worth considering because they bear on the application to today's overall cultural situation of Baruch's words from this morning's First Lesson that are also the text for this sermon: "He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant, and to Israel whom he loved."⁷

When the Bishops of the Church do the jobs for which they were consecrated to God's service, as by using the *charism* of their Office and the graces conferred on them in the Sacrament of Order to preach the truth to the people of God, then those Bishops, as the Successors to the Apostles, form one of the prime ways that God makes His Wisdom

known to His people. And that is just what Archbishop Léonard [**LAY-uhn-arhd**] has been doing and that is precisely what the Belgian newshounds have been castigating him for doing.

The most recent vehicle of his teaching, and the one that has caused the self-appointed Belgian intelligentsia to decry the Archbishop as “repugnant”, “disgusting”, and “stupid”, is a book published this Summer in Flemish, or Dutch. *Gesprekken met Monseigneur Léonard*, (in English, something like “Conversations with Archbishop Léonard”). It is the product of more than two years of lengthy interviews by a journalist to whom the Archbishop spoke with great candor and, sometimes, against the advice of his staff.

And what did he say that several Belgian parliamentarians found so “repugnant”, “disgusting”, and “stupid” that they are now attacking the Roman Catholic Church’s status as a tax-exempt charity? Archbishop Léonard [**LAY-uhn-arhd**] had the unmitigated gall – and no, that’s not spelled G-A-U-L, it’s G-A-L-L; after all, he’s Belgian, not French – had the unmitigated gall to say that people suffer undesirable consequences when they make immoral choices.⁸ And notice especially that, contrary to his current critics, he did not say, as Our Lord’s disciples assumed in today’s Second Lesson and as so many today still do, that physical misfortune in this world is God’s penalty laid on the unfortunate as punishment for their sins.

In one question contained in the new book, the Archbishop was asked specifically about the AIDS epidemic. He answered expressly that AIDS is not a punishment from God, but “It is more a kind of immanent justice [that is, a ‘justice’ inherent in the nature of creation], somewhat like ecology and the environment: as when we have to pay the bill for what we have done to the milieu [meaning to the environment].” He went on to explain, “If we act inappropriately with physical nature, nature in turn will mistreat

us. And when people deal inappropriately with the deeper meaning of human love, that brings catastrophes at all levels.”

No fair-minded person could see this as anything other than a salutary message of personal responsibility, based firmly in the Old Testament’s lessons about good stewardship over what God has entrusted to us, including over our own physical bodies. Yet this is precisely the message that prominent Belgians cannot abide having placed before the Belgian people, undoubtedly because it runs so completely counter to that “culture of death” that Pope Benedict has made such a central theme of his own teaching.

So, apparently in order to make the Archbishop’s words seem even more heartless and ill-considered than his critics already claim they are, in the news accounts of the new book those few lines – out of two years’ worth of comments, be it remembered – are invariably linked with prior well-publicized statements Archbishop made on the true nature of homosexuality.⁹

The Eurocrats, with their social agenda, are clearly inhospitable to a prelate who teaches, as the Church has always taught, that homosexual behavior is “abnormal” because it goes against the essential purpose of human sexuality, that is, against the propagation of the species. In a 2007 interview, Archbishop Léonard [**LAY-uhn-arhd**] said, “It is an imperfectly developed stage of human sexuality which contradicts its inner logic. Homosexuals have encountered a blockage in their normal psychological development, rendering them abnormal.”¹⁰

Homosexual activists responded to this bit of common sense by accusing Léonard [**LAY-uhn-arhd**] of trying to “stigmatize” homosexuals whereas he has made it clear that it is homosexual activity that is abnormal, not people with homosexual preferences. And, predictably,