

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Second Sunday after Trinity¹

I. Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the thirty-first Chapter of the Book of Job.³

“... If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother’s womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure. If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.⁴

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This is also why the Articles of Religion teach us that “Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; ... for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done [that is, out of love for Him], ... they have the nature of sin.”⁹

VI. Conclusion.

This, then, is at bottom the essence of the message St. Paul taught to the Corinthians; as we say in almost every celebration of the Mass:

THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.¹⁰

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on Quinquagesima Sunday, 2009.

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

³ Job 31:13-28 (KJV).

⁴ I Corinthians 13:1-13 (KJV).

⁵ *Ibid.* 13:8 (KJV).

⁶ *Ibid.* 12:1 (KJV).

⁷ *Ibid.* 13:3 (KJV).

⁸ *Ibid.* (RSV).

⁹ *Article XIII, Of Works before Justification*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 603 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 69.

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III. Introduction.

Today's Second Lesson is Chapter 13 of First Corinthians. The prior Chapter, Chapter 12, begins with St. Paul's famous words, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”⁶ Chapter 12 goes on to give a general overview of the place of such gifts in the Church. That discussion then continues with St. Paul's detailed consideration of two of the most obvious among those gifts: love and speaking in tongues.

Notice, please, two significant differences between Paul's respective treatments of these two gifts. First, he places love before speaking in tongues, implying that it is a more important gift. Then he confirms that suspicion because he writes at great length about the virtues and value of love and then at almost equal length about the essential uselessness of tongues, at least in the public worship of the Church.

IV. Theme.

Our reading for today, Chapter 13, is the first of those specific discussions and is devoted to the topic of love as a spiritual gift. That is a very significant insight: that the capacity to love is a gift from God. This implies, correctly, that we do not automatically have this capacity and, therefore, that absent His gift of it to us, we are unable fully or completely to love others.

In other words, our love of others is a reflection of, and a product of, our love for God, which itself originates in our response to His love for us.

V. Development.

In the Anglican Catholic Church, our official translation of Scripture for use in the public services of the Church is, of course, the King James or “Authorized” Version. After all, the

original purpose for which that translation was made was to provide the text for the readings in our services.

My text from that was, once again, “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

Note that the King James Version uses the word “charity”, which comes from the Latin *caritas*, meaning simply “love”. This is what “charity” meant to the Jacobean while, between their time and ours, the meaning of “charity” has tended to narrow to the point where it now connotes specifically philanthropic or eleemosynary activities rather than “love” in general.

This distinction is shown in one of the passages of today’s Second Lesson: “Although I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, ... and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”⁷ In the modern acceptance of the word “charity”, this appears to be a self-contradictory statement but it becomes much clearer in the Revised Standard Version and in other similar modern translations: “If I give away all I have, ... but have not love, I gain nothing.”⁸

At this point you might well say to yourselves, “If I give my goods and treasure to others, that shows that I love them. Why else would I give these things to them?”

A few moments’ thought will suggest there can be many motives for such gifts other than pure, unselfish love. The structure of the tax system is one: many people much prefer to direct the disposition of their own wealth and not to leave it to the tender mercies of government bureaucrats, so they wish to choose the objects of their involuntary bounty as they themselves see fit.

They then take tax deductions for these gifts and so reduce their overall tax burden. The net effect is that they are out of pocket by so much as they have given away but they would anyway have been out of pocket by a significant amount had they paid taxes on their full incomes without the benefit of those deductions.

Without the carrot of the tax deduction and the stick of the marginal tax rates, these “gifts” might well never have been made. As it is, they proceeded from the urge to exert control, not from any sacrificial love for their recipients.

Then, too, people sometimes give to what we call “charities” such as art museums, symphony societies, or opera guilds, because that is a way of getting recognition in certain social circles or because it is expected of them and they are afraid, or at least embarrassed, not to fulfill those expectations.

None of those gifts really proceeds from love, does it? And while the money is just as useful to the “charity” that receives it when it is given for selfish or social reasons as it is when it is given out of true charity, it is only these latter gifts that can actually provide their givers with any real satisfaction.

So this is why St. Paul says, “If I give away all that I have, ... but have not love, I gain nothing.” This love that must animate our giving is, as we said before, properly our personal response to the love God has shown toward us, particularly in His sending His Son to die for our redemption. If God loves all men and women to that unimaginable extent, how can they fail to deserve our love as well?

Thus our love for others is intimately connected with our love for God which is itself necessarily based in our belief in Him. After all, we cannot reasonably love Someone in whose existence, or loveableness, we do not believe.