

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
THE PATRONAL FESTIVAL (OF A MARTYR)

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Book of Job.³

“... I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. They meet with darkness in the day time, and grope in the noonday as in the night. But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty. So the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth. Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.⁴

“... After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud

voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

I am going to tell you some stories this morning, and the first one is a Bible story. It’s about a man named Elijah. He lived in a time when apostasy and immorality were rampant in Israel.

The king had married a pagan woman who was a devotee of a god called Baal [**BA**Y-ull]. Her religion revolved around nature, fertility, and the agricultural cycle. It included what was called sacred prostitution. The queen was determined to force her religion on the whole country, and not only the king but the priests as well were too emasculated to stand up to her.

Those who accepted the queen’s religion were promoted and honored. Those who opposed it were pushed to the margins of society and ridiculed at best. Elijah was one who publicly opposed it. He challenged the priests to a contest in which he not only hu-

² *Psalms and Lessons for Special Occasions* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xliii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Job 5:8-21 (KJV).

⁴ Revelation 7:9-end (KJV).

miliated them in public but actually ordered their execution. That earned him not just a rebuke but a death sentence.

Elijah fled for his life, and while he was hiding in the desert, he began to feel sorry for himself. He felt isolated, unappreciated, and angry with those who had so easily thrown over the religion that had formed them into a great nation. So he took his complaint to God.

Well, God told Elijah to stop feeling sorry for himself. He was not really the last of the true believers. There were thousands of others whom Elijah did not know about but whom God knew were still loyal to him.

God also told Elijah to get and do things. First, God told Elijah to anoint a new king to replace the king of Syria. God, after all, was the ruler of the whole world and not just of Israel.

Second, God told Elijah to anoint a new king over Israel itself.

Finally, God told him to anoint a successor to himself in the prophetic office. That man was Elisha, whose name is similar to Elijah's own name.

The lesson here, I think, is that things are not always going to be the same as they are now. There is a future and it is in God's hands. Moreover we all have a part to play, albeit a very small one, in bringing that future to fruition.

Elijah went out and did as he was told, and not long after that he was swept up into heaven in a mighty wind and a chariot of fire. And before I go on to my next story I will simply mention in passing that wind and fire were manifestations of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Elisha inherited the mantle and the spirit of Elijah, and my next story is about him.

One day Elisha and his servant found themselves surrounded by a small army that had been sent to capture the prophet. The prophet's servant was scared. "What are we going to do?" he asked. But Elisha told him not to worry. "Those who are with us are more than those who are against us."

The servant looked around, but all he could see was the enemy. So Elisha prayed for him. "Lord, open his eyes that he may see." The servant looked around again, but this time he saw the whole mountain behind him covered with horses and chariots of fire and an army of angels ready for battle.

There is more to this story, but the point I want to make is that you and I are a lot like Elisha's servant. We look through the eyes of the flesh and see all the forces that are against us. But we fail to see the tremendous resources that God makes available to us when we seek to do his will.

There are angels and chariots of fire here in Charlottesville and all over the world, ready to engage the forces of evil. We are not really as alone or as weak as we may think, but we have to look through the eyes of faith rather than the eyes of flesh to see that.

Now you may wonder what these two stories have to do with All Saints Day or with either of the passages read to you today from the Scriptures. Perhaps my final story will help you make a connection between these two stories.

This is not a Bible story, but it is a story of faith. It is about a young boy who was an acolyte in a small church. He was serving at the altar on a day when there was a lot going on in places other than the church. People were busy. The boy's mother lamented the sparse attendance. But the boy said, "Oh Mother didn't you see them? Jesus was there, and His Mother, and all the Apostles, and the angels, and the martyrs, and all the people we know that went to heaven before us. Didn't you see them?"

Well, of course, she didn't see them. But they were there. And they are here today. They are here whenever we gather at this table or any table on which we give thanks over bread and wine. They are never separated from Jesus. They are present wherever He is present. They hear our prayers. They join in the praise that we offer to God. That is why we say in the preface to the *Sanctus* [SAHNK-toose] "with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name...."

Today's Second Lesson depicts "a great multitude which no man can number, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." These are our companions, our brothers and sisters in faith, the family into which we have been adopted through Holy Baptism. Do you see this great host? Do you feel their presence?

You have to look through the eyes of faith to see all of that. If you look only through the eyes of the flesh, you see only a pathetic little band of people with little influence in the world, opposed by powerful forces which honor no god beyond their own desires and their own agenda.

But there is a future, and it is the hands of God. Things will not always be as they are now. Even now things may not be as they appear to the eyes of our flesh. Those who are with us are greater than those who are against us. Lord, open the eyes of our faith that we may see them.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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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).