

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
Christmas Day (December 25)²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of Micah.⁴

“But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

“And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

“...
...”

“... But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

“And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the fourth Chapter of the First Epistle General of St. John.⁵

“... Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

states St. John. When we love others as God wills us to, then we show God's perfect love in our lives.

Let us pray,

O loving Father, who in Your incomparable love for us gave Your only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ to suffer and die to save us, help us always to show forth that same love to all Your creation in our hearts and lives. Let us thereby demonstrate that we are indeed Your children in the world. This we pray through Your Son, our Lord's sacrifice of love for us. *Amen.*

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner MSW¹⁰
June 10, 2012

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 This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Micah 4:1-5 & 5:2-4 (KJV).

⁵ I John 4:7-14 (KJV).

⁶ I John 4:7-12 (RSV).

⁷ “The Summary of the Law”, *The Order for The Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943). This is a conflation of the slightly different quotations found in St. Matthew 22:37 (KJV), St. Mark 12:30 (KJV), and St. Luke 10:27 (KJV), all of which are based upon Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁸ St. John 15:13 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 3:16 (KJV).

¹⁰ Deacon, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church, serving at Holy Angels Anglican Catholic Mission, Picayune MS and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie LA.

Homily:

In today's Epistle, we are given a challenge and a goal for which to strive. As we meet that challenge, we begin to understand the nature of God. It is the nature of God to love us, and it is our highest calling to love God in direct return and, in indirect return, to love all His creation.

St. John exhorts us all: “*Beloved, let us love one another.*” Let us each hold each other in the highest esteem, in bonds of affection and respect. It is so easy to find reasons to hold each other in contempt, or in disregard. We often find the silliest reasons to dislike each other: “My neighbor has absolutely the ugliest flowers in his yard.” “I really hate people who drive too slowly.” Or even one of my favorites: “How could anyone support the Falcons?”

But St. John reminds us that love is of God, and that “*He who loves is born of God and knows God.*” That is because our Lord has taught us first and foremost to love one another. This teaching came both by word and deed. So He said: “*Thou shall 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 shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*”⁷ The Lord is our Creator, our very Maker. It is He who gives us life. It is He who makes possible our salvation through the forgiveness of our sin.

Had we abstained from sin in the first place, and not been separated from God, then we all would still live in a state of perfect love and acceptance of each other and of God. Sadly, we did not do so; we rebelled against God in the Fall, and God's love for us that permits forgiveness became necessary for us to be reconciled with Him.

In order to make that forgiveness possible, the Father gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to come and live as a

man and to die as one of us—but not the death of the fulfilled old life, but death on the Cross. Our Lord consented to that death and came to live among us as a man, willingly submitting Himself to all the shame, hypocrisy and evil of the world as He taught His disciples, then even went willingly to the Cross to redeem us.

Parents, ask yourselves: which of you could consent to such a thing? Which parent here would be willing to allow his or her only child to die, innocent but in agony, as a criminal, to save others who were not innocent but were, unlike Him, guilty? Children, ask yourselves: which of you would be willing to do such a thing?

St. John in His Gospel offered that “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”⁸ Only someone who truly understands the loving mercy of God could even think of such a thing.

Love, St. John says, is of God. Love comes from and is created and made possible by God. When we show love to others, we demonstrate that we are God’s own, as love can only come when we know God. Also, as love is a godly trait, when we show love to others, we ourselves become more like God. Alternately, when we show hate, envy or malice, we are showing those things which we get from the evil of the world, which God abhors. But love restores us to God, because it is God’s command that we show love to others.

It is worthwhile to draw a distinction here between the kinds of love. The ancient Greeks had four distinct words for love, and they refer to different kinds of love. True, unconditional, sacrificial love such as that between God and man, and reciprocated between man and God, is *agape*. It is the widest, most fulfilling of loves. It is generally *agape* to which the Gospel refers when it uses the word “love”. *Eros* is that passion felt between lovers, and generally refers to a physical longing. *Philia* is friendship or a general love between members of groups,

family members or others. Finally, *storge* is natural familial love, expected as part of a relationship.

Without God, *agape* is not possible, though certainly positive feelings towards family, friends and lovers might exist. But as St. John says, “*He that loveth not, knoweth not God.*” Without love, one cannot know God, for God is love. If there were ever need of proof that God is love, St. John states, the proof is found in the Father’s sending His only begotten Son to save His creation from its own sin. There can never be any greater proof of God’s love than this. By the gift of His Son, the Father extended to us the chance that we might live through Him, restored to holiness and our relationship as the very children of God.

In the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the proof of the worth of the human soul in the eyes of God. How else could He have suffered the agony of the Cross, and the sorrows of His blessed death and passion for us? How can the value of this gift ever be understood? In short, it cannot, save by this: “*for God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in Him might not die, but have everlasting life.*”⁹

And if we have been given this gift beyond all compare, then we owe to Him who gave it to us that we do as He commanded us: “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*”

We do this to demonstrate His Holy Spirit within us and to do our very best to live as His children. We can truly do no less. “*No man hath seen God at any time,*” says St. John, but if we act as His children and show the love to others that we are commanded to show, then others can see God in us.

This is because “*If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.*” He also then acts through us, using us as His tools and representatives in the world. Then is God’s love “*perfected in us,*”