

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The First Sunday after Easter

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-third Verse of the second Chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon.²

“... For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it.

“But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself. As gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt offering. And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign for ever. They that put their trust in him shall understand the truth: and such as be faithful in love shall abide with him: for grace and mercy is to his saints, and he hath care for his elect.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.³

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God

with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity. Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it. But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Parents often scrutinize their children to see what features they have passed on to their offspring. Friends and relatives do the same, and it is common to hear them comment,

Let us each endeavor to show through every aspect of our lives just whose children we are. Let's make our family line show in every aspect of our lives. We are children of God—so let's make that relationship evident to anyone and everyone who sees us at any place and at any time, whether in church, or in stores, or at home or at work. Then will our hope be full of immortality.

Let us pray.

Lord, we rest assured in the knowledge that we are Your children, made by You to be with You in eternity. We know that we are to model our lives after You, and that none of the trials of life can affect Your love. Help us to faithfully remain dedicated to Your will for us and to Your worship. This we ask in Your Son's Holy Name. Amen.

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Larry Wagoner, MSW⁵
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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² *Wisdom 2:23-3:9* (KJV).

³ *Romans 1:1-12* (KJV).

⁴ *Wisdom 2:23—3:4* (KJV).

⁵ Licensed Lay Reader, Holy Angels Anglican Church, Picayune, MS and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie, LA.

“Oh, he has your eyes,” or nose, or sometimes even, “Thank goodness she got her looks from her mother!”

Yet, when we look only to our parents to see our origins, we see only a small part of our real background. We are much like Plato's proposed man who makes judgments about his world based on the shadows he sees while he stays safely ensconced in a cave. As Plato's man sees the world dimly and incompletely, so do we see an incomplete picture when we rely on the DNA and RNA offerings of our family only to explain who we become. When we rely on only these things, we ignore our spiritual natures.

We are so much more. As the Book of Wisdom reminds us, “*God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity.*” Clearly our physical bodies are not going to live forever, but our souls do—and to ignore the eternal to the benefit of the transitory is obviously to lose sight of the more important reality.

We are the creation of God. If we truly wish to understand our own nature, we need to look to God for the information. We are intended to reflect God. Our Lord intended for us to be immortal—as He is—and to live with Him eternally. That is what Jesus Christ purchased for us on the Cross to redeem us from our sins—by which we had abandoned God. We had, for the benefit of temporary things, rejected the eternal. Jesus, by the power of His resurrection, restored us to the eternal.

If we live eternally, we do not die. But, through the works of the devil, evil and death came into the world. “*Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it.*” Those who follow the ways of the devil, who engage in sin, find death as their final reward.

Not the death of the body, which we all must face, but the death of the spiritual relationship we have with God. The

death of the body, as Jesus Christ taught us in His Resurrection, does not end life. It does not kill our spirits.

Only sin, from which we are freed through His Resurrection, can kill our spirits. It therefore behooves us to remain always seeking God's will for us, and to follow His ways. Our Lord has paid for us the price of our redemptions, and we remain free from sin as we stay secure in Him.

Wisdom's author ben Sirach states it, "*but the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them.*" We are assured that as long as we remain faithful to God, He will remain faithful to us. He created us to be immortal as He is. We are to be in His image of immortality.

The world of non-believers, of course, does not understand this. They presume that we are subject to the same fears, worries and doubts that they are. This is why non-believers often do not understand how believers can find joy and peace, even in the midst of strife and trouble.

This is why non-believers find so much to fear in death. They literally do not know what will become of them—and they find the prospect of an eternity of non-existence terrifying. Believers, on the other hand, know that they are secure in God's love. They need not fear the arbitrary timelines of the human body.

"In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace," according to Wisdom.

Those who do not know God, and do not know the protection of salvation, think believers die as they do. The non-believer fears the utter destruction that is the absence of God, but believers have the sure hope of eternal life. The non-believer sees death as the end of things, while the believer knows that physical death is only the beginning of the next life.

For the non-believer in God's grace, the corruption of the grave is permanent, while to the believer in that grace, the grave is but a temporary resting place. This is why believers are at peace facing their lives and their struggles, as well as the end of their physical lives. The non-believer fears that which he does not understand. The believer looks forward to what God has promised to all the faithful but the non-believer has nothing to which to look forward.

While it might be that the lives of believers and the lives of non-believers appear the same from the outside, it is what they have filled their lives with that makes the difference.

Believers are filled with the Wisdom of God. They are filled with the Grace of the Holy Spirit. They are filled with the Love of our Lord, Jesus Christ. They are filled with the Peace of God which truly passes understanding. This is why, as Wisdom says, "*For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.*"

Non-believers, regular men, may think that the end of life, or the struggles of life, are punishing to believers. What they do not seem to understand is the perspective of the believer. The believer knows these trials are temporary. The believer knows he can be secure and safe in God's love.

The believer knows from whom he comes, and who it is he is to resemble. The believer knows he was created by God, and he knows "*God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity.*"

When people look you over, do they see your Eternal Father in you? Can they say, "*He certainly has Jesus' loving acceptance about him,*"? How about more simply, "*You can certainly tell he is a Christian—it is evident in everything about him*"?