

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE
(OCTOBER 28)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-second Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁴

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith [SETH] unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto

him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Gospel: *"Jesus said unto his disciples, If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."*⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

How do we as Christians distinguish ourselves from other people?

⁵ St. John, 14:15-17 (KJV).

⁶ Authorship of song.

⁷ THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943); THE HYMNAL 1940 (PECUSA 1940), THE HOLY BIBLE, King James Version, Revised Standard Version.

⁸ St. John, 14:15-17 (KJV).

⁹ St. John, 14:27 (KJV).

¹⁰ Second Collect for Whitsunday, *The Collects, Epistles, and Gospels To be used throught the Year*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 182 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹¹ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Anglican Catholic Pro-Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.

Most people would probably say that we are different because we believe in the Trinity, and the deity of Jesus Christ as part of that Trinity, and that He rose again, and in the teachings of the historic Church. That is certainly true, and it is vital.

But unless we were professing our faith to them, or they happened to observe us in church, how would anyone else know we were Christians?

The old children's song held that "*they'll know we are Christians by our Love.*"⁶ We are taught from an early age that the second great commandment is that we love our neighbors as ourselves, and we may certainly hope that the love of Jesus Christ shows in our lives and in our behavior towards others, but what else is there?

In many ways this is one of the failings of Christian Education today. We sometimes teach everything else but what makes us different.

We find it easy to teach others about the conduct of church – the liturgy, the songs, the prayers. We have these fine resources to help us, after all, the Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal and the Bible.⁷ We can teach even a young child about the colors of the liturgical season, and about the differences between the various services of the Church.

It is, perhaps, a little more difficult to teach our church history, as convoluted as it sometimes is. But even that can be managed by a skilled instructor with a deft sense of history and telling of the stories and patterns of history. But our knowledge is not what makes us different. There are surely scholars in theology who could speak eruditely for hours about the structure, worship and history of the Church, who do not hold any recognizable faith in God.

It's not our clothes, though we all have some sense of modesty and appropriate dress. It's not in our national origin,

nor the color of our skin, nor our native language. The answer may be found in today's Gospel reading.

*“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”*⁸

The world in general does not have within it the Holy Ghost. As Jesus told His disciples, the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because it does not see or understand God, and does not know God. But the disciples—and we are among them—we have the Holy Spirit within us. We have that guiding beacon, that comforter, dwelling in us. That is truly what makes us different.

If the Holy Spirit lives within us, then that Spirit alters us, makes us burn to follow the will of God the Father and the Son, Who sent the Spirit. And that is what people who are not of the faith see when they observe someone who truly holds the faith of God.

They see someone who listens to a voice not of the world, but of God. They may refer to that as “having a conscience,” but it is more. It is not just doing right because they somehow feel it is right, but because God wants it that way. They see someone not focused on the things of the world, but on heavenly things. People of faith tend not to be focused on earthly rewards, but on rewards that only God can give. They see someone who is in the world, but not of the world.

They are often challenged and even threatened by that reality, because they do not understand it. The person of faith, however, remains at peace, even if attacked for holding that faith.

These people have heard and truly understand Jesus' words when He said, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”*⁹

When Jesus gives peace, it is not a few minutes of quiet, nor an uneasy armistice. It is the unalterable, unconquerable peace of the unmatched ruler of all creation. It is that peace that allows the person of faith to be and live without fear, without trouble, without recrimination.

That is why we are different. That is why people know us as Christians. It is not xenophobic, or wrong, or closed-minded to say so. We are different, and we are different because God calls us to be and allows us to be, through the Salvation of Jesus Christ, and with the Grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray.

Almighty and most merciful God, grant, we beseech thee, that by the indwelling of thy Holy Spirit, we may be enlightened and strengthened for thy service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*¹⁰

—oo0oo—

The Rev. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹
May 19, 2013

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 *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Deuteronomy 32:1-4 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 14:15-end (KJV).