

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes, or, the Preacher.⁴

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁵

“... And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, say-

ing, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In the Book of the Proverbs, we are told, “*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*”⁷ In the same book, we are cautioned, “*When pride cometh, then cometh shame.*”⁸

Now, there are those who will protest at the notion that pride is necessarily evil. Surely, they think, there is nothing wrong with being proud of our accomplishments. Surely we do things of which we should rightly be proud.

What about the accomplishments of modern science, they ask, or medicine? What about the great works of literature, of art and music? What about the architecture of the ages which causes us to stop and marvel? Can it really be that nothing we have done as a species is something to be proud of?

Let us consider the facts of the case. It is undeniably true that modern science has given us insight into many things. Humans are a curious species, and we have learned some things about the intricacy of the atom, of the nature of the universe, and of the structure of our planetary home, the Earth. Science has given us a method by which we can explore, document,

measure and catalogue our world. But the ability to measure, and to question, is not in and of itself worthy of praise or pride.

It should be asked, from whence did we obtain science? Where did our curiosity come from? Why do we have this innate need to know more about ourselves and our world? Does anyone really believe that random associations of atoms became self-aware on their own?

And more to the point, all our studies in science attempt with great seriousness and devotion to answer questions about how things happen, but they seem to strenuously ignore a more fundamental question—*WHY* do they happen?

Even many of the most devoted proponents of a science with faith absent have been forced to recognize that none of the science makes sense without an intelligent designer. That term, of course, is a way for them to avoid saying, “Science makes no sense without God as original cause.”

Modern medicine is sometimes offered up as a source of pride, but who among us has not been forced to ponder the question of whether we have achieved any significant improvement in the quality of life? We can make life longer, by some measures, but can we make it better, fuller, more rewarding? Can modern medicine even pretend to offer eternal life?

Only God can do that—and He has done so. Indeed, the first physicians were men of the church, who studied the human frame and its frailties out of a desire to understand and honor God’s creation.

Literature, art and music are the signs of civilization, we are told. These are the marks of the human mind reaching out to touch other minds and other lives. Yet, all the great works of literature can sit upon shelves in the great libraries of the world, works of art can hang and stand in museums and public halls, and music can ring out, but without the receptive heart, inspired

by God, the books collect only dust, the artwork fades and cracks and the music dies away.

Inspiration, but to create the literature, music and art comes from God, and the receptive heart to receive and understand those works also come from God. Indeed, God is the source of love, of joy, of kindness.

Without these things, how could science ever be? What would be the motivating factor behind the inquiries of the scientists if not love of the reflection of God in humanity, and the desire to do kindness to others? From whence would come the joy of discovery?

We know what the answer is when God is absent. Do you want to see science and medicine absent God? Look at the atrocities of the Nazis in their concentration camps. Look at the fanatical drive to perfect torture as evidenced in ruthless regimes throughout history.

Art, literature, music without God? Consider *Mein Kampf*, for instance, or Charles Manson's crazed writings. There are numerous examples of literature, artwork and music which was created not to honor God and His creation, but only the evil men do. Examined alongside works meant to glorify God, they are empty, shallow and meaningless. In the final analysis, this is why human pride is so out of place. It presumes human accomplishment without God, and that humans can do good on their own, absent the divine.

The Pharisee in today's Second Lesson does not thank God, but only himself for what he pretends are his accomplishments. Such a stand is the height of presumption and arrogance. As our Lord admonishes, "*every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"⁹ Pride is of this world, but as John states, "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*"¹⁰

Let us pray.

ALMIGHTY God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking; We beseech thee to have compassion upon our infirmities; and those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*¹¹

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW¹²
August 11, 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 This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

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

⁴ Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 18:9-14 (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 18:14 (KJV).

⁷ Proverbs 16:18 (KJV).

⁸ Proverbs 11:2 (KJV).

⁹ St. Luke 18:14 (KJV).

¹⁰ I John 2:16 (KJV).

¹¹ *Prayers and Thanksgivings: Collects*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 49 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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