

Sermon for Morning Prayer Epiphany VI

Lessons:ⁱ

A. The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word....

“... Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: ... For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies. For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus

shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

✠Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

A. Isaiah 66: 1-2, 10, 12-16.

God's judgment and salvation....

“Thus saith the Lord!”ⁱⁱ

God announces himself! He has a message for the people of Israel returning from exile – and to those of us in His Church today. God is the one who has heaven as His throne and the earth as His footstool.ⁱⁱⁱ What significance, then, has this “house”, the Jewish temple – or humble Anglican Catholic Church building? Besides, the Lord, who speaks, cannot be confined to one place; everything comes from God anyway!^{iv} He is asking His people to get real for a change! Stop and think!

What God is looking for in worship is the **obedient response of a humble heart.**^v Without the offering of the heart a sacrifice at the temple is just a mindless pagan act or, for us in today's time, a mindless trip to the church building for social interaction and entertainment. **God has no pleasure in receiving worship which is a pretense.**

Isaiah calls all those who love Jerusalem (and have grieved over her) to rejoice! She is the mother of all, giving wealth and well-being, support and comfort to her people.^{vi} Similarly those today who love and are members of The Church should rejoice! We also receive wealth and well-being, support and comfort, and – even better – salvation and sanctification! Isaiah however does not neglect to tell us that the other side of God’s blessing is that He will judge, punish and destroy His enemies.^{vii}

B. II Thessalonians I.

St. Paul, in his second letter to the Church of Thessalonica, continues to thank God for the way in which the Christians worshipping there are growing in faith and love.^{viii} This is all the more remarkable because they are being persecuted simply for their belief in Christ.^{ix}

St. Paul explains that even their suffering proves God to be true. When the gospel is preached it shows up the hostility of evil to good. This of course is still relevant today. Those who reject God and the good news of Jesus inflict cruelty on His Church. One day God will put the situation to rights.^x He will reward His faithful people and punish their persecutors. As a result of their persecutions, St. Paul prays that Jesus will be glorified (seen for who He really is) even through their suffering.^{xi} St. Paul’s prayer is still relevant for our sufferings today. In a very fine sermon George Macdonald, a late 19th century Congregational minister and author wrote “the Son of God suffered unto death, not that men might not suffer, but their sufferings might be like His (Unspoken Sermons).” Do we suffer as Christ suffered? Each of us, every day, should strive to reveal and glorify Jesus through our daily trials and tribulations.

Suffering does not discriminate. A lot of people, probably most, live day to day attempting to eliminate every “single” circumstance in their lives that leads to suffering. They will never succeed. Everyone suffers whether healthy or sick, intelligent or slow of mind, married or single, rich or poor. The richest man in the world has no immunity; he would tell you that even he suffers. One of the first things that a very rich man probably comes to realize is that when he gets to heaven he will have no pockets.

If you find yourself currently blessed in this world, you have either suffered, or someone else has suffered for you.” Christ could have chosen not to suffer. His was a choice of total “undeserved” suffering. He chose to suffer for each of us.

The least each of us should do is to continually strive to reveal Christ through our suffering.

✠Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xiv (PECUSA 1928).*

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 66: 1.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Isa. 66: 1.*

^{iv} *Isa. 66: 2.*

^v *Isa. 66: 2.*

^{vi} *Isa. 66: 12-13.*

^{vii} *Isa. 66: 14.*

^{viii} *II Thessalonians 1: 3.*

^{ix} *II Thessalonians 1: 4-5.*

^x *II Thessalonians 1: 7-10.*

^{xi} *II Thessalonians 1: 12.*