

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

St. Matthias Day

(February 24)ⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Verse of the second Chapter of the First Book of Samuel, otherwise called the First Book of the Kings.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith [SETH] the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith [SETH], I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith [SETH], Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni [HAHF-nye] and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.^{iv}

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*”^v In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

One of the finest images ever presented in a sermon that I was privileged to hear was the simple image of drinking seawater. If survivors from a sinking ship are together in a lifeboat, no matter how thirsty they may be, the worst thing they can do is to drink seawater. The salt in each drink adds to thirst, rather than quenching it. Eventually they go mad before dying of dehydration. Each drink adding to the thirst, rather than quenching it, is a good image of addiction but at the end of the day it is a picture not only of addictions, but of all sins of the flesh. Each time the flesh is indulged it craves more: “Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.”^{vi} Do not drink seawater, and do not try to satisfy lust.

“Brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”^{vii} says St. Paul to the Romans. That portion of the Epistle to the Church in Rome began with the reality of your new life given to you in the waters of baptism. And, in sharp contradiction to modern heresy taught by that other denomination (the one that embarrasses even the atheists), Baptism is not a license to sin, but the sacrament whereby you have died to sin and come alive with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

As Our Lord told the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar,

“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”^{viii}

To drink of the Spirit of life in Christ is to find satisfaction that the seawater of sin cannot give. To walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh is to know God “whose service is perfect freedom.” To let go the weight of sin, to cut yourself loose from the burden, is the great joy of freedom. It may hurt. Repentance may hurt so badly at first that our Lord compares it to plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand.

He is not unaware of the pain it may involve to repent of some sins. He is not unaware of the pain some may feel even as they let go of

bitterness and decide to forgive. He is not unaware of the agonies of “cold turkey,” whether from real addiction, or from lusts of the eyes and of the flesh, or even “cold turkey” from a wrong romance outside of marriage. The Lord knows that some repentance hurts at first but afterward it brings peace. Besides which, these sober words must be heard and taken to heart: “for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell.”^{ix}

These are things that the false prophets will not say to you. The Lord warns of them, coming in sheep’s clothing, looking so very holy and good, but inwardly, he warns us, they are ravening wolves. They court your favor. They do not preach that we should repent and forsake our sins; they aid you only in deadly self-deception, just as enablers help addicts destroy themselves. And, they add to the deceptions and errors of modern society by presenting an image of God who has made no Commandments, and who approves of sin, and so needs to forgive nothing.

In 2009, I read a startling statistic in The Washington Times: A full 40 percent of all children born in this country are born out of wedlock, up from 25 percent four years before that, six years ago. Have we really come to a time when people are so unconcerned about their children that they make no effort to provide stable homes and family life? Yes, we have. And, why not? Children are treated as throw-away objects while they are vulnerable and helpless, still growing in the womb, having no protection of law. This is a sin of our whole country.

And marriage is treated as an experiment, and something that may be redefined by the stroke of legislators’ pens and the whims of their votes, as if marriage were man-made rather than ordained of God and as if human nature can and should be altered. Indeed, for forty years extreme feminists (both male and female feminists, since many men hold that ideology too) have told us that God made some big mistakes in creating human nature the way He did, and it is their crusade to change it, or destroy it trying to change it.

Therefore, innocent children are offered in sacrifice to their god of convenience and egalitarianism, and marriage is offered in sacrifice with

the innocents. People in our time increasingly display not only ignorance of the moral Laws of God, but increasingly they display their inability to comprehend morality at all. Sadly, churches are simply going along to get along, and often fail to teach their people what they need to know in order to live. They let them drink the seawater, and make little or no effort to guide them to the water that Christ alone gives; that alone satisfies thirst.

Yes, these are the things the false prophets will not tell you. They preach a different gospel, not heeding the warning of St. Paul:

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”^x

That alarming statistic, that forty percent of American children are born out of wedlock, reveals the failure of the clergy above every other group in modern society. I have come to see that a clergyman may be a false prophet without ever teaching error overtly. All he needs to do, to present another gospel, is to so court your favor that he becomes one who pleases men, and cannot, therefore, be a servant of Christ. In an Anglican context, such a man may enter a pulpit with the intention of watering down the power and the wholesome effect of the Scriptures that are read, and of the Biblical truth that sounds clearly as a trumpet throughout the whole liturgy of Holy Communion. He need merely make it go down, as the song from Mary Poppins says, with “a spoonful of sugar.”

I have advised men who study for Holy Orders as follows:

“It is not the duty of the clergy to blunt the sharpness, to soften the hammer, or to quench the fire. Woe to the preacher who protects the people from the word that kills, because he protects them also from being made alive- truly and forever alive. Woe to the preacher who acts as a buffer, deflecting the force of the scriptures to soften the blow, because in protecting from the stroke, he prevents the healing. If his labors in the pulpit amount to a lifetime of standing between the people and the word of God, reducing its effect, taming it and making it polite, presentable and harmless, he will have nothing to show for it in the end but wood, hay and stubble instead of gold, silver and precious stones.

“It far easier to preach if a man (informed by the Tradition of the Church) will ride the Scriptures like a wave, letting them make their own point, and arrive at their own destination. If the passages that have been read speak of life and death, then elaborate on life and death. If they speak of repentance then preach that men should repent. When they encourage faith, proclaim faith. When they warn of Hell and the judgment to come, then blow the trumpet as a faithful watchman on the walls. When they comfort, speak as a pastor who feeds the sheep. Let the meaning of the Scriptures be expounded to their full effect, proclaiming from them the truth that affects the eternal destiny of the souls in your care.”

The reality is this: The message is the same as always. Repent and believe the Gospel. And the Gospel is the same Gospel that was preached by the Apostles and that has been taught and “believed always, everywhere and by all.” Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day as the scriptures foretold. After His resurrection He was seen by many witnesses. To be saved from sin and death you must repent of your sins and believe this Gospel. Some churches have a new message. We preach the old one, the one that came from the Living God.

The Rev'd Robert Hart^{xi}
August 14, 2011

ⁱ *This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 2011.*

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

ⁱⁱⁱ *I Samuel 2:27-35 (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Matthew 7:15-27 (KJV).*

^v *St. Matthew 7:15 (KJV).*

^{vi} *Proverbs 27:20.*

^{vii} *Romans 8:12-13 (KJV).*

^{viii} *St. John 4:13-14 (KJV).*

^{ix} *St. Matthew 5:29-30 (KJV).*

^x *Galatians 1:6-10 (KJV).*

^{xi} *Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.*