

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

The Tenth Sunday after Trinityⁱⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forty-fourth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.^{iv}

“Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith [SETH] the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun [dgeh-SHOE-runn], whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith [SETH] the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew [SHOW] unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

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“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Romans.^v

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth **[SHOW-eth]** mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Today’s Second Lesson includes the passage appointed as the Epistle at Mass on the First Sunday after the Epiphany and the focus of that Epiphany season is the revelation of the Word made flesh, and beholding His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.^{vi} Each Sunday, for the first few weeks of that season, we are told what can be seen, as in beheld, that reveals Divine glory in the man Himself, the Lord Jesus.

Looking at Jesus at the age of twelve, I am reminded of something my friend, David Mills, once wrote about the efforts of a writer named Ann Rice to create a biographical sketch of Jesus: “There is one Person whom we must not try to understand in terms of psychology,” or words

to that effect. How true. We are not in a position to analyze Jesus Christ, or to guess at motivation for His words and actions.

Once I read a priest's attempt to create a vivid picture of our Lord's time growing up and seeing suffering people, and wanting to do something about it, and so forth. This author objected to my criticism that he had reversed the revelation of Scripture. I told him, "that is not the Word made flesh, but flesh becoming the Word. You have it all backwards." You see, Jesus did not acquire the motivation to become the Light of the World; rather He came into the world as its light. He did not undergo, as we must, a conversion. He came here to save us from sin and death.

"And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world."^{vii}

Jesus is the only one who ever *came* into the world. The rest of us have our origin here. In His Person the Word is with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, eternal, uncreated, beyond our comprehension, hidden from the sight of mortal eye, pure and separate from all sin and evil, unknowable as dwelling in the darkness of mystery and in the radiant light of Divine glory. Every other nature is created, and everything that we can know is from the things that are created. God alone is not created, and therefore no creature shares His nature as without beginning, without end, having neither parts nor passions, utterly transcendent above all we can know or even imagine.

And, so it is that no one ever *came* into the world except the One who created it. The glory of God is now revealed, and though we cannot comprehend Him in His Divine glory, we can know Him through His Incarnation. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." So, we should not be surprised to find Him as a boy, twelve years old, already possessing wisdom that astonishes the most learned rabbis and doctors of the Torah.

I once heard a preacher comment on the part of the Gospel of St. Luke that is paired with our Second Lesson at Mass on the First Sunday after the Epiphany. There is a bit near the end that says: "And he went

down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.” This man said, essentially, that Jesus’ youth and inexperience had gotten the better of Him and He needed to go home and learn from the older, wiser folks. That would be true concerning anyone of us, we who did not come into the world, but are from beneath. Not so, however, the One who is from above, Who is not of this world. The human nature He took was real and was fully human. And that human nature was able to grow in wisdom and in stature. But the Person Who took to Himself fellowship with us by taking human nature, is, properly, God the Son, One with the Father.

The human nature of Jesus was not subtraction (as some have misinterpreted self-emptying), but addition. *Added* to His eternal *uncreated* Person is the created nature we share with Him. To fulfill the Law for us, He went back to Nazareth and was subject to His adopted father Joseph and to his mother Mary. And this He chose willingly, after demonstrating His wisdom by revealing just a little bit of it and then choosing the way of obedience and humility. This was the choice He made from His internal strength, not dependence due to weakness. Because of His Divine Person, in His human nature He is at once like everyone else, and yet not like anyone else. And, that is what we must learn from this part of St. Luke’s Gospel.

Jesus’ humbling of Himself, subjecting Himself to parental authority, and remaining from that time out of public view, was all part of that perfect obedience to the Law by which He saved us from sin and death (that is, the Law of God given through Moses). For in accepting a place of submission and humility, of obedience and even the role of a servant, He was already obedient, eventually unto death on the cross. This has everything to do with the fact that He, the one who had no sin of His own, identified with us, even with us sinners. In time He fulfilled this perfect obedience.

St. Luke’s curious phrase that is translated “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” means literally, “Why did you look for me? Did you not know I would be with my Father?” Some have rendered it, “in my Father’s house?” This was not an enthusiastic youngster getting above himself. This was God the Son reminding them that He was here as the Son, eternally

begotten of the Father. Yet, we see Him descend, we see him go down from Jerusalem (for from Jerusalem, the Jews saw everything as descent). That Gospel for Epiphany 1 reveals the path of descent which He journeyed for us. He went back with them, and was subject unto them, in perfect patience and obedience. This was not a person humbled by circumstance, but rather the Lord choosing to humble Himself.

St. Paul writes:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”^{viii}

His coming into the world to reveal the glory of God was for you and me. His death on the cross was for you and me, to save us from sin. His resurrection from the dead was for you and for me, to save us from death. And, now we offer ourselves, not as if we did some great thing. Rather it is the service we owe from gratitude.

Today’s Second Lesson says: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Reasonable service in the Greek is *logika latre’ia* (λογικὴ λατρεία). It is logical, or reasonable, to respond with worship, with liturgy. We will respond even in words, saying in our Holy Communion liturgy, “And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee.”

This Second Lesson also tells us, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” So, part of this whole logical liturgy of offering our very selves to God is to

love Him with all our mind, filling it with the word He has revealed in sacred Scripture, so as to follow the One who came into the world to choose us out of the world; in our minds transformed so as not to conform to the sinful world around us. For, unlike Jesus, we need conversion; we need to change, and we need to be saved from the sin and death of the fallen world.

It may seem a big thing to give ourselves to God in a reasonable life of worship as living sacrifices but in so doing, as we are transformed with renewed minds, what we give back to God is gratitude by obedient cooperation with Him as He saves us from the darkness of sin and death. Even in giving ourselves to Him, we are the ones who *receive* a gift, the grace to be transformed as children of God unto eternal life.

This is why we focus in this season on Who Jesus is. Soon we will focus on what He did for us and does for us. To understand that, we focus on the Word made flesh, and the glory He revealed from within Himself, the glory of His Divine Person.

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The Rev'd Robert Hart^{ix}
January 8, 2012

ⁱ “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* xxxi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle and Gospel for the First Sunday after the Epiphany.

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

^{iv} *Isaiah 44:1-8, 21-23 (KJV).*

^v *Romans 12:1-9 (KJV).*

^{vi} *John 1:14.*

^{vii} *John 8:23 (KJV).*

^{viii} *Philippians 2:5-11.*

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