

# **SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER**

## **The Second Sunday after Trinity<sup>i</sup>**

### **Lessons:<sup>ii</sup>**

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the thirty-first Chapter of the Book of Job.<sup>iii</sup>

“... If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother’s womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure. If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirteenth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.<sup>iv</sup>

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove

mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Homily:**

I am glad that we use the old English, the Authorized, that is King James Bible. I prefer the use of the word “charity” to the word “love” for the Greek word, ἀγάπη or *agape* [**ah-gah-PAY**]. Our use of language follows certain traditions that predated the Bible in English. The word “charity” speaks very specifically of the highest kind of love, and cannot be used properly for anything lower. The English word, “charity” is from another old language, one into which the Bible was translated by Saint Jerome, namely Latin. *Agape* [**ah-gah-PAY**] was translated into the Latin *caritas* [**KARE-ih-tahs**]. The most famous line using that word is the one by Saint Augustine: *In Omnibus Caritas* [**in OMM-nih-boose KARE-ih-tahs**], “In all things charity.”

The word “love” is used in modern translations, but I am glad that more and more writers are rediscovering the word “charity.” It cannot be used in a way that confuses its meaning. You can say, “I love a big juicy steak” but you cannot say, “I have charity for a big juicy steak.” The possibility of interpreting the meaning of “love” in a selfish way

disappears if we understand *agape* [**ah-gah-PAY**], or *caritas* [**KARE-ih-tahs**], that is, charity.

The modern world has been infected by theories of human psychology that no well-balanced person can accept. By these theories every action, every feeling, every thought is always selfish all the time. By these theories, every human thought, word and deed is predetermined by someone's psychological condition; and everything is really completely selfish. These theories destroy all notions of courage, and of giving, and of everything that comes from the virtue we call charity. And, these theories come, ultimately, from the enemy of mankind, the adversary of every human soul.

The highest of the virtues is charity, and the scriptures tell us that this kind of love is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”.<sup>v</sup> That is from Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. And in his Epistle to the Galatians, he tells us that this love, *agape* [**ah-gah-PAY**], is the first of “the fruit of the Spirit”.<sup>vi</sup> In every way we are dependent on the Holy Spirit in order to have this virtue, because charity is the love of God Himself. And, this love can be planted and grown within us, but not simply from our efforts. We need the Holy Spirit of God.

To understand it, we must first know a bit of theology. We need to know God as He reveals Himself by His Word and by His Spirit. You see, to know this love we must first know that God is “Wholly Other”, that is, His nature is distinct from every created nature, visible and invisible. The angels do not share God’s nature, because they, like us, are creatures. God is Other. And, this must be followed by knowing the words of Saint Paul, that God “hath need of nothing.” The reason that *agape* [**ah-gah-PAY**] never seeks anything for itself, that it has no selfish element, is because God is completely without need of anything. God did not make the human race because He needed us. The love of God is satisfied in eternity within the Trinity of Persons, so that God is never alone. Man does not bring comfort, solace or companionship to the Trinity, because God “hath need of nothing.”

My younger brother, David, made a big splash with his first book, *The Beauty of the Infinite*. The most important point he made in it is that God made everything as gratuity; that is a gift. Creation is not

necessary. The universe did not have to be. You did not have to be born. Our very existence is completely arbitrary and unnecessary, the result of extravagant Divine generosity. Why, then, are we here? Not as objects that can give God anything, but as objects of His love.

Knowing this, we can again value the reality of every good thing that comes from the virtue called charity. Selflessness does exist, existing first in God's gracious giving of life itself. The heroic sacrifice, the selfless pouring out of the heart, all comes first and foremost, and only, from the One Who is Love. The world is safe for romantics, or at least well-balanced individuals, after all; the most cold-hearted forms of clinical theory that would take away from us everything beautiful and noble, will be done away with when the heavens are rolled up as a scroll, and we see the Lord in His Glory face to face.

Knowing this, we can look again at today's Second Lesson and see it for what it is. Hear the words of the prophet Isaiah from chapter 53:

*“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”<sup>vii</sup>*

This ought to bring to life the words of Saint Luke:

*“Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.”*<sup>viii</sup>

Isaiah foretold that simple phrase, “*Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures*”,<sup>ix</sup> that is, in fulfillment of the Scriptures. And the words “*and He rose the third day, according to the scriptures*”—again, fulfilling the Scriptures. That He rose again fulfills the words of Isaiah, that after He was dead and buried “*He shall prolong His days.*”<sup>x</sup> And Saint Paul tells us that the love of God was commended toward us because, “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”<sup>xi</sup> I want to make this clear: In order to know the love of God for you, lift up your eyes and look at Jesus on His cross, dying in your place. You must take it personally.<sup>xii</sup> Once knowing that love, you can be given the strength to have such love for others, even for those who respond to it with hostility. This love is true freedom having no obligation to respond in kind to abuse; soaring above malice and bitterness, spreading mercy like wings.

Our creation itself is a gift, something God gave to us. Our redemption from sin and death is a gift as well. In the healing of the blind man in Chapter 18 of St. Luke’s Gospel, we see that God does not deal with us as our sins deserve. The blind man did not *deserve* to be healed because, like everyone of us, he was a sinner. But he was healed; he was given back the gift of eyesight. The healing of the blind man signifies that God forgives sin; every miracle of healing signifies this, because “*with His stripes we are healed.*”<sup>xiii</sup> The healing of the blind man was a gift, given by the One Who earned that forgiveness for him, which he could not earn for himself. The question that we must ask is not: “Why are so many people not healed of their illnesses?” The question that we must ask is: “What does it mean that Christ heals anyone ever at all?” Saint Anselm tells us that all of the benefits of Christ’s suffering and death have been given to us, for He had no need of anything for Himself. So, when I see Christ showing mercy to the blind man, I understand better what happens later in the story; I understand better what His cross has done for me.

In that we see love that is completely selfless and giving.

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The Rev'd Robert Hart<sup>xiv</sup>

February 19, 2012

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<sup>i</sup> *This sermon was originally written on the Epistle at Mass on Quinquagesima Sunday, 2012.*

<sup>ii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>iii</sup> *Job 31:13-28 (KJV).*

<sup>iv</sup> *I Corinthians 13:1-13 (KJV).*

<sup>v</sup> *Romans 5:5 (KJV).*

<sup>vi</sup> *Galatians 5:22 (KJV).*

<sup>vii</sup> *Isaiah 53:4-10 (KJV).*

<sup>viii</sup> *St. Luke 18:31-33 (KJV).*

<sup>ix</sup> *I Corinthians 15:3 (KJV).*

<sup>x</sup> *Isaiah 53:10 (KJV).*

<sup>xi</sup> *Romans 5:8 (KJV).*

<sup>xii</sup> *Consider the words of St. Paul: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20 (KJV).*

<sup>xiii</sup> *Isaiah 53:5 (KJV).*

<sup>xiv</sup> *Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.*