

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

The Fourth Sunday after Trinityⁱⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Chapter of the Proverbs.^{iv}

“Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy? Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. ... Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off. My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-sixth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.^v

“... Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam

out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The words of Jesus in today's Second Lesson come in separate sections. Let us look at each one, one by one.

"Be therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."^{vi}

This is not about pretending not to know right from wrong, but about mercy. All too easily, we apply to others a standard we would not want applied to us, not about right and wrong, but about forgiveness. It goes without saying that everybody, including everybody here, is a sinner. I am not talking about notorious and unrepentant sin. I am not talking about accepting a low standard of conduct, either for others or for ourselves. I am talking about the need of every person, at some point, to be forgiven failures or offenses.

Jesus commands us to be merciful because God Himself is merciful: *"Be therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."*^{vii} It is that very appeal, to be merciful because God is merciful, that is taken up later by St. Paul: *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*^{viii} *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."*^{ix}

One thing that has plagued the Church in recent decades, particularly our own Continuing Anglican branch of it, is a readiness to pull away from each other. Rather, God commands us to acquire the combination of love and humility that preserves not only good order, but the sacramental bond of fellowship and communion by which we are in

Christ. Separating from a religious body that cast off the truth of the Gospel was unavoidable but continued secessions are not, thereby, justified.

God, as our Father through His only begotten Son, has brought us into His own family and made us His children. Just as an earthly father rejoices to see his grown children love one another, and is grieved if it is otherwise, so it is out of love for God that we are told to love one another in the Church: *“Even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you,”*^x says St. Paul; and *“even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”*^{xi}

Not to be a judge means not to set yourself up as the judge, not to condemn, not to write off your brothers and sisters as hopeless cases, beyond the pale, not worth bothering with. It is easy to take a mental photograph that freezes individuals in time, perhaps at their worst. But the truth is that the Holy Spirit, the One Who is at work in your heart and life, is active also in changing and sanctifying all of God’s children. That mental image you retain, taken at someone’s worst moment, needs to be torn up and thrown away. This requires faith in God, in this case, in the Holy Spirit Who is at work changing your brother just as He is changing you.

Since the measure you mete will be meted out to you, love one another, be merciful, and have faith that God the Holy Spirit is at work.

“And he spoke a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”^{xii} Jesus used the image of the blind leading the blind, on another occasion, to speak about the dangers of religious leaders who teach false doctrines,^{xiii} specifically of the Pharisees. But, here in this context, Jesus uses the same words to speak of something different, which we shall see in a moment. But, first let us consider the words, “The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”

Though He was Lord of Heaven and Earth, Jesus accepted the role of a servant for our sakes. His patience was more than remarkable; it was, *literally*, Divine.

“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”^{xiv}

“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”^{xv}

“Even as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”^{xvi}

This must be the attitude of each one of us in His Church. We are here to serve, to wash one another’s feet, and so to be like our Master, or Rabbi.

I mentioned to you the man who told me he wanted to be a priest, in fact, that he wanted to be a bishop, and that he asked me, hypothetically, “isn’t it right to want to climb to the top of your chosen field?” I mentioned to you also that I told him to forget entirely about ordained ministry; that I would not help him on that road, not even one little bit. If ever he comes back to see me, I will hope it will be because he wants to serve God, even if it means washing the feet of his brethren; and that he will have no longer a desire born of ambition. It is enough to be like our Rabbi, our Master Who came not to be served. And, this calling, to be like Christ, is everyone’s calling. It is your calling and it is mine. Be content to serve in whatever way God has called you and given you gifts for service. It is enough.

“And why beholdest thou the mote [speck] that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam [log] that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye.”^{xvii}

You can see, as I said, from the context that Jesus has used the image of the blind leading the blind, and both of them falling into a ditch, differently from how He used it regarding the Pharisees. And, here we see that one of the services you may provide, out of love that moves you to be merciful as our Father is merciful, is to pull the speck out of your brother's eye.

To the degree that your brother may need your help, you cannot help him blinded, as you are, if you are walking around with a log protruding out of your own eye. When it comes to helping your brother get his eye clear, if you are the one to be of help, first remove the log that blinds you.

Well, that is simple enough to understand, surely. But, the reality is subtle. We all prefer to see the faults of others, and to ignore our own faults; and that includes the fault of finding fault. “Why isn't *you-know-who* just the most judgmental, fault-finding and critical bore we know?” When my brother was a young and mischievous seminarian, he wrote a sort of not-quite hymn that went:

I thank Thee Lord, for I hear tell
That some poor slob just went to Hell.
I thank Thee I am not as he,
An hypocrite and a Pharisee.

Spiritual warfare is a reality concerning which our own people have all too often been quite dangerously naïve. Think of these words by St. Paul: “*To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*”^{xviii}

But, today the Church is ignorant of Satan's devices. One of the tragedies of our Continuing churches is the disproportionate number of people, in far too many cases even of clergy, who proved themselves ignorant of Satan's devices. We cannot afford the luxury of ignorance about Satan's devices. He still goes about as a roaring lion, and it takes real humility to resist him. It takes, also, steadfastness in the faith.

We have an enemy already—our common enemy; and we are all on the same side. It must be like the musketeers said: “All for one and one for all.” Or, to put it better, “*Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*”^{xix} “*Be therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*”^{xx}

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The Rev’d Robert Hart^{xxi}

July 17, 2011

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* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Fourth Sunday after Trinity.

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

^{iv} *Proverbs* 27:1-6, 10-12 (KJV).

^v *St. Luke* 6:36-42 (KJV).

^{vi} *St. Luke* 6:36-38 (KJV).

^{vii} *St. Luke* 6:36 (KJV).

^{viii} *Ephesians* 4:32 (KJV).

^{ix} *Colossians* 3:13 (KJV).

^x *Ephesians* 4:32b (KJV).

^{xi} *Colossians* 3:13 (KJV).

^{xii} *St. Luke* 6:39-40 (KJV).

^{xiii} *St. Matthew* 15:12-14 (KJV).

^{xiv} *St. John* 1:10-11 (KJV).

^{xv} *St. John* 13:13-17 (KJV).

^{xvi} *St. Matthew* 20:28 (KJV).

^{xvii} *St. Luke* 6:41-42 (KJV).

^{xviii} *II Corinthians* 2:10-11 (KJV)

^{xix} *Colossians* 3:12-14 (KJV).

^{xx} *St. Luke* 6:36 (KJV).

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