

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

The Fifth Sunday after Trinityⁱⁱ

Lessons:ⁱⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the sixth Chapter of the Book of Judges.^{iv}

“And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah [**AHF-ruh**], that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite [**AY-bye-EZZ-right**]: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew [**SHOW**] me a sign that thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

“And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah [**EE-fuh**] of flour: the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it. And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

“Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.^v

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret [**geh-NESS-uh-rett**], And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man... and Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”*^{vi} In the Na~~x~~me of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

To come face to face with God, in such a way that we recognize Him, brings us to the realization of our own unworthiness, of our own sins. We know from the Gospel of John that Simon had already met Jesus, and was aware that He was a holy man. Andrew, Simon’s brother and partner in their fishing business, had declared his belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Simon was ready and willing, as we see, to defer to Jesus, to give Him use of his boat, and even to follow His instructions about a matter that must have been, as this fisherman would have thought, outside the expertise of a carpenter and rabbi. Nonetheless, at the Lord’s word, out of respect for Him, and perhaps out of affection for Andrew as well, Simon Peter went out and let down the nets, despite what a wasted effort fishing proved to be all night long. But in what happened next he saw that this Rabbi was in command of nature, and that even the fish in the Sea obeyed Him.

The Old Testament has a companion text, in the sixth chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. Like Simon Peter, Isaiah was going about his daily routine. The vision he saw took him by surprise. As he wrote it:

“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And He said unto me, Go and tell this people Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.”^{vii}

He saw the Lord, and heard the angels cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy”—three times crying “holy”; once for each Person, for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because he saw God, Isaiah was aware of his own sins: *“Woe is me. I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips.”* As Simon, centuries later, would fall down at the knees of Jesus, saying *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,”* we see that Isaiah was suddenly overcome by the knowledge that he was not worthy to be in the presence of the Holy God of Israel. Isaiah already knew, as later Simon also knew, that God is holy; and each of them knew of his own shortcomings; and even though centuries apart, each of them was, in his own time, suddenly face to face with God. Face to face with the Holy God who is like a refiner’s fire—indeed, as everyone will be if only at the Last Day, when He comes again in glory to judge the quick and the dead.

The angels in the temple cried “the whole earth is full of His glory.” We can go about our daily lives in great comfort, in a state of relative calm, because the idea of the Lord upon a heavenly throne keeps Him just a bit distant, maybe even too far away to notice the every day sins we allow ourselves to get away with, or so we think. But Isaiah saw Him upon the earth, the earth that was, as he heard the angels say, “full of His glory.” That glory was not only an ethereal glory, for he saw God, present here in this world. The temple, as he knew, was the place of God’s presence, but hidden behind a veil in the *Kadesh h’ Kadeshim*, the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest could go, once a year and not without blood. With God in heaven and behind a veil, life feels safe: “God is in his heaven, All’s right with the world.” Even the temple felt comfortable as long as God kept His

distance, safely behind the veil. But, suddenly, Isaiah saw Him, not only as the God of heaven. He saw the Lord here on earth.

One might even ask, what was God doing here where, surely, He doesn't belong? It is most unsettling. So, with Simon Peter, the Lord is not any longer only behind the veil, or hidden away on His heavenly throne. He is here, present in the flesh, standing before Peter in his own boat. Into this little wooden craft—a whole world of daily work, sweating, toiling and all the anxieties of normal life, where Peter and Andrew were accustomed to their routine—comes the *Shekinah*, the visible presence of God, the Word made Flesh. Like Isaiah centuries before, it was terrifying for man to see that God is here, on earth, present in the world, and present in our own world. Like Isaiah of old, Peter knew one thing above all else at that moment. He was a sinner, a man of unclean lips, not worthy of this Presence before which he found himself.

And that is a good place to begin. When people are influenced by New Age thinking, that, as they think, a thing called spirituality is better than a thing called religion, their outlook is clouded. A culture that cannot accept moral standards, with churches that no longer teach the commandments of God, exalts a morally neutral concept, a thing called “spirituality.” “Spirituality”—a word without definition and context—should ring hollow in your ears as Christians. When you hear people speak of being spiritual, without the effort to be holy—if I may borrow a popular phrase from the movie world—they give in to the Dark Side. “Spirituality” can be a morally empty word, especially if we consider that Satan has been a spirit far longer than any of us have been alive. We need to remember instead that Saint Paul, in his Epistles, tells us that all Christians have one vocation in common. No matter who we are, we are all “called to be saints.” That is, called to become holy. In comparison, it is the easy way out to choose a thing called “spirituality” instead of this revelation about the Christian life and vocation. And, as we see, the only way to start on the path to holiness is by seeing the truth about our own sins in light of the fact that God is present here on earth. The earth is full of His glory and therefore full of His presence. It is so whether we see His glory or fail to see it.

When Isaiah said “*Woe is me*” and when Peter said “*Depart from me,*” each man suddenly very aware of God's holiness, and each convicted of his own sin in the light of that holiness and awful Presence, the answer to each came in the call to ministry. Forgiveness was more than implied; cleansing and purification were also more than implied. We are reminded every time we have the service of Holy Communion that the full price for our sins was paid by Christ Himself, and that forgiveness is no mere sentimental thing; it was granted to us by His suffering and death on the cross. But, also, we are called to ministry, that is, to service. Now not all Christians are called to the Ordained ministry, obviously.

But, as the Epistles of Saint Paul point out, we have all been given gifts by which we serve God, serve one another and both show forth and tell His word to the world around us. It is an old tradition to refer to the sacrament of Confirmation as the ordination of the Laity. That sacrament is not a rite of passage, or simply a ticket to Holy Communion. Based upon the Book of Acts, the theology of Confirmation is this: through laying on of the apostle's hands, the Holy Ghost is given. In short, that means that when you were confirmed you were given gifts from Christ, concerning which you yourself may be unaware. You, each of you who have received that sacrament, are carrying precious treasure in an earthen vessel, each one bearing Christ Himself, to show forth by deeds, and in some cases by words, wisdom and power that do not come from your own strength.

And, in another mystery, here today we come face to face with God. The bread and the cup of which we will soon partake are the Body and Blood of Christ. We dare not approach them except we first, with hearty repentance and true faith, confess our sins, and hear the words of forgiveness. And so, we need not say to Christ "*depart from me*" because we know that in confessing and forsaking our sins we find mercy. We have communion with the Incarnate and Risen Christ in a mystery beyond our understanding. He is not simply hidden away in heaven. He is here on earth, both in the little boat of your daily life as well as in the temple of our prayers. He has made known His presence, ultimately as He has come in the Flesh, died and risen again; and He has sent His Holy Spirit to empower His Church with gifts of service. And, He comes each Sunday morning that we celebrate the Blessed Sacrament, in gifts and creatures of bread and wine that become His Body and Blood.

When you return from the house of the Lord into the daily common places, the fishing boats of your life, remember that upon seeing His glory and receiving His cleansing, you have heard His call. By the life you live this week, among all sorts and conditions of men, you are going out to tell this people. As Christ our Lord said to Peter on his boat, we may hear Him say to us "*Fear not.*" We are henceforth going out to catch men.

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The Rev'd Robert Hart^{viii}
July 24, 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 for Mass on the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, 2011.*

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

^{iv} *Judges 6:11-23 (KJV).*

^v *St. Luke 5:1-11 (KJV).*

^{vi} *St. Luke 5:8 & 10b (KJV).*

^{vii} *Isaiah 6:1-11 (KJV).*

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