

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the seventeenth Chapter of the First Book of the Kings, commonly called the Third Book of the Kings.⁴

“And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. ...

“And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth.

“And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁵

“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to

Speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Some years ago there was a typical high school graduation in suburban Baltimore. No prayers or references to God were scheduled. But during a brief pause in the ceremony, a man stood up, and in full voice, began saying the Lord’s Prayer. People thought it was part of the ceremony, so they all joined in. One of the students ran out of the auditorium to phone her parents, who protested and filed a complaint, which was later overruled. Most everyone at the ceremony was glad to have a prayer. Here was a man who stood in the gap, ministering where ministering was needed, acting out of a sense of duty. It would seem that this man is a patriot, with a strong sense of God and Country. We can have God without a country, but we cannot have a country without God.

A patriot, with a strong sense of duty to both God and Country, knows the importance of sacrifice and of heroics. The man who stood up could have gotten into a lot of trouble. Some people who stand up that way do get into a lot of trouble, especially in times of conflict and war.

We are grateful to God for all who sacrifice on our behalf, to secure our liberties, even to the point of bloodshed and death. The Church encourages such sacrifice by hanging up the picture of the ultimate Sacrifice of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

In today’s Gospel, the widow of Nain is also a picture of the Church, grieving over the death of her children in sin, each of whom is dear to her as an only son. There are so many millions, swamped in vice and misery, lost in the cesspools of secular humanism and ideology. They are Christ’s and He yearns for their lives to be brought again into union with His. They are not hopeless. There is a power which can restore. There is One Whose compassion is strong to save.

The widow's son was past all earthly help. But He who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, visits His people. In His Presence, hopelessness vanishes. Tears are wiped away. The dead can live, and the dead are raised today. And those dead in their sins are raised and released today. Souls that were wrecked have been cleansed and restored by the Precious Blood: your soul and mine. Souls that were weak beyond recovery have been strengthened and preserved.

This morning, right here, our Eucharist points through Jesus' Cross to the resurrection, because the Father rejoices in doing us good with all His heart and soul. "With joy you will draw water from the well-spring of salvation."

There is a phrase in today's Gospel which is typically to the point, no beating around the bush. This phrase is, "there was a dead man carried out." In today's politically correct parlance, the widow's son might be called "biologically challenged," but not dead. We cannot call someone a cripple; we have to say he is "physically challenged." A slum is called an "area of urban deprivation." A janitor is a "maintenance engineer." What should be an unapologetic war on terror is called an "overseas contingency deployment." The modern ideologue is always slipping away from the truth, away from reality, into ideology. A Christian patriot aspires to be forthright and truthful, speaking the unvarnished truth, without spin, using plain, simple English.

One thing was clear in the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940: Great Britain put it all on the line to save Christian civilization. Then we came in to help finish the job. The United States and Great Britain have a common heritage and a friendship and an alliance which is utterly unprecedented in the history of the world. As sister nations we are, together, God's battle ax in the world. Every so many years we link up to save others from tyranny and disaster, as in the First and Second World Wars.

From 1945 to 1948 we did, together, what has never been done before in the history of the world, on so massive a scale: we completely re-habilitated our enemies, with the Marshall Plan in Europe, and MacArthur's governance of Japan. We helped make the world more resurrectional. Our enemies became foremost trading partners in the world. Israel came into existence in 1948, and continues today, only because of the Anglo-American Alliance. Britain's victory over the Ottoman Turks

in 1918 set the stage, and together with America, made the miraculous emergence of Israel a reality. None of this is coincidence.

Since the founding of Israel, the Anglo-American Alliance has stood together in Korea, Vietnam, the Falkland Islands, Nicaragua, the Balkans, Kuwait, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan, to name but a few places in our time. Anything done to weaken this alliance is an affront to the millions who gave their lives to make the world more resurrectional.

The Anglo-American Alliance has existed in the past because of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church. Nearly all its leaders have been Anglicans and Episcopalians. This is but one reason why the devil is so interested in our community and wants to tear us apart. In order to destroy the Christian West, the devil knows that he must first take out the United States, and to do that, he must tear apart the Episcopal Church. Today it is up to us to put everything we can back on the rails, in our relations with traditional, orthodox Anglicans both here and abroad, especially in the Mother Country, and this is part of the high calling of Forward in Faith International.

Solzhenitsyn's Harvard Commencement Address, June 8, 1978, tells us that we are to promote the defense, not of human rights, but of human obligations. As so much culture in the West deteriorates into the worship of Ba'al [**BAY-ull**], we to counter this not by thinking legalistically but by thinking morally and sacramentally. We as Anglicans can recall the great sacrifices of the great saints who led us to a great vocation. Their vision was always moral and sacramental, not political. St. Paul did not try to end slavery. He cut it off at the root, in the Epistle to Philemon, by saying that a run-away slave is his brother-in-Christ.

Robert E. Lee did not try to end slavery. He made sure that he went to the altar rail last, with the black folks, so that he could kneel and receive Holy Communion with them as their brother-in-Christ. Once the communion in the Holy Spirit is revealed, the politics takes care of themselves. Pope John Paul the Great did not waste time getting into political fights with Gnostic feminists. He turned his Wednesday addresses into a series called "The Theology of the Body," a series so profound that it cuts off Gnosticism at the root, and will be studied for the next 50 years.

The heritage of the United States and Great Britain as Christian nations is extraordinary. Our vocation is extraordinary, as a servant people. We excel in every sphere; our greatness is everywhere. It is expressed in the greatness of our music, art, architecture and literature, as well as in our technology. And it may well be that the Christians of the British Isles and the United States converted more of the world to Christ than anyone else. The reason why God raises us up to greatness is so that we can be a servant people.

Who in the 9th Century would have thought that the language of a small back-water island would become the language of the world? No one has served the world better than the Christians who took root in Great Britain, and spread out to its colonies. The proof of this service to others is that vast multitudes want to live either in the United States or Great Britain. The immigration of so many tens of millions into the United States, on the whole handled peacefully and creatively by the Church and the culture, is utterly unprecedented in the history of the world.

Our entire heritage is woven from the fabric of the Gospel, which we heard proclaimed this morning. We are steeped in it, and we will neglect it to our peril. As we embrace it, we find ourselves at the gate of Nain with a young man's mother, who gets more than she ever expected. She asked for nothing and ends up with her son raised from the dead. She is restored to joy. The crowd is astonished. The boy is bewildered. Jesus' love defies all categories. Where can I find this love of Christ? It turns out that I can find it in the smallest place of all—my own heart—in the depth of my own insignificant being. What a paradox: Christ's love is so big I can't comprehend it, yet it fits in my heart and fills me with all the fullness of God.

As a Diocese and as a Parish, we need not concern ourselves with our numerical size or bank account or fame or political clout. We should have as much of those things as God wants us to have. Walter McDougall, a history professor at the University of Pennsylvania, told an amazing story involving a fairly recent summer Olympics held in Barcelona, Spain. It is a story not unlike the one about the man who stood up and said the Lord's Prayer at the high school graduation.

Obviously, for the Olympics there are massive preparations and years of financing and training. But what was planned for the opening ceremonies, for the lighting of the great Olympic Torch, was theologically profound. The Torch was not lit by a long taper held up by an athlete. The Torch was not lit by engineers on

a scaffold. The Torch was not lit by flipping a switch. The Torch was lit by a paraplegic in a wheelchair with a bow and a flaming arrow.

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The Rt. Rev'd Paul C. Hewett⁶
September 23, 2012

¹ “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).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), The Book of Common Prayer xxxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ I Kings 17:8-9, 17-24 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 7:11-17 (KJV).

⁶ Bishop Ordinary, The Diocese of the Holy Cross.