

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Proverbs.⁴

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

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

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith **[SETH]** unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Where will it all end? Four-year-old Andy wakes up and discovers that the dog has chewed his plastic guitar. He has a fit of grief. Mom’s nerves tighten. Yesterday’s headache starts coming back, and she snaps at Tom as he leaves for the office. Tom feels the unhappy send-off and greets his secretary with some cold and ridiculous instructions. She immediately picks up his mood and at coffee break tells off a fellow secretary. Fifteen minutes before closing time the second put-down secretary vents her anger at Tom and tells him she’s had it. About an hour and a half later, Tom walks into his house after fighting heavy rush-hour traffic. Seeing his wife, he blurts out an angry word because little Andy left his bike in the driveway again. Mom turns around and yells at Andy, whose eyes fill up with tears, and he runs to his room and slams a door, and kicks the dog.

Where will it all end? Every reaction is understandable. Each person has a reason for being upset. But what that little world of people needed that day was someone who could absorb unjust treatment without lashing out. And this is where a Christian has a unique opportunity. By knowing the Father’s will, by following the Son’s example, and by relying on the Holy Spirit’s help, he can put up with bad treatment in order to show a better way. In terms of a chain reaction of anger, he can be where it all ends.

If the Christian is to break the chain reaction, he is going to have to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We seldom have the inner resources to untangle the mess described above. Obedience has become something of a negative word in secular culture today. In the Church of England’s 1662 Book of Common Prayer the bride vows obedience to her husband in the marriage service. We are, by the

way, celebrating the 350th anniversary of this Prayer Book, which was the first one used in the American colonies, including of course, South Carolina.

The woman's vow of obedience was removed in our 1928 American Prayer Book lest anyone think that obedience turns us into doormats. Quite the opposite. The Bible has an exalted view of obedience. Obedience to the Lord is precisely what exalts me, and brings me into the fullness of all that God intends. But obedience to another human being is never unconditional. No one is obligated to grovel before a communist or a Muslim tyranny. A woman could be married to a tyrant, or an alcoholic, or to a man who exerts no authority whatsoever. Even so, a spouse can very often be won over, especially if he is willing to surrender to Christ.

God's Plan is this: the more a man submits to Christ, and cherishes and loves his wife, the more she feels like following his lead, and the more she comes into her own as a person, and expresses what is uniquely hers. And the more she respects her husband, the more considerate and tender he is toward her. God's Plan is an upward spiral.

We must all learn to obey God and be submitted to one another out of reverence for Christ. *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father in heaven."* The great characteristic of Moses was his obedience. He was faithful in all God's house as a servant. His proudest title, by which he is known even in heaven, is "the servant of God."

God could always depend on Moses. He was a man after His own heart, who could fulfill all His will. And it was to him, and not to the disobedient hearts of the people, that God revealed Himself. This is consistent with the words of our Lord, who said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and I will manifest myself unto him." Obedience is the stepping stone to vision. We must be servants before we can be friends. That path of obedience is rough and steep, but it is the only way to the mountaintop. This is always so. The scientist must obey nature, before he can expect to survey the harmony of nature's laws.

The Holy Spirit is always prompting and stirring us. If He prompts us to turn off the TV and read Evening Prayer first, we can choose to obey. We can follow His stirring in us to write that long overdue letter, or to refrain from that harsh remark, or to surprise someone and clean up a mess without being asked, or to go home early to be with the family, to run that extra lap, to dare to do right even though we may be alone in the crowd, we will be fulfilling an important condition for experiencing and seeing God.

Blessed James DeKoven was one of the 19th Century saints of the Episcopal Church in Racine, Wisconsin, near the famous Johnson and Johnson wax building. DeKoven helped found the Nashotah House Seminary nearby, and he founded the Community of St. Mary. He wrote,

“We live in an age when cowardice in religious matters has been dignified into a virtue. Pray to God to make you bold to do His will. Dare to give up the world, with its pomps and its pleasures and vain applause. Be not afraid of its sneers or laughter, or, what one needs to dread much more, its tenderness and anxiety and solicitude. It will applaud you as long as you echo its own tone, but it cries out against fasting and prayer, and obedience and penitence, and the ever-recurring Eucharist. Dare to believe in Christ and the Bride of Christ, and to practice what you believe.”

In the passage from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans that forms today’s Epistle reading at Holy Communion,⁷ the Apostle talks about our sonship. In baptism we were made members of God’s Family. We were made sons of God by adoption and grace. We were given the spirit of sonship whereby we cry, abba! Father! We are now heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

By the way, whenever the Bible talks about the person, singular, the reference is usually masculine. Each one of us as a person is a son, in the Son. Whenever the Bible talks about the corporate, the reference is usually feminine. Together, as a whole, we are the Bride of Christ. From beginning to end, in the Old Tes-

tament and in the New, there is a complete balance in the biblical view of the sexes.

What is it that is most central to our sonship? What one word sums up our relationship with our heavenly Father? In other words, is there one word which sums up the Catholic Faith? I always ask this question when interviewing men for Holy Orders. Adam and Eve gave the answer by negative example. The Blessed Mother, the New Eve, gave it by positive example. Obedience. This one word sums up the life of sonship. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”* As God’s children we are not just to tolerate His will. We are to have an ever increasing burning desire for it.

This sermon began with an example from everyday life, at the micro-level. But the same principles apply at the macro-level, on the big stage. The great secular-humanist lies of our time seduce men away from God, proposing that mere mortals can be like gods. Power, not love, is the ultimate moral absolute. Fascism is creeping up on us again. Truth and morals are said to be relative. The socialistic ideal is heady and attractive to many. But secular capitalism alone can never prevail against the socialist ideal. Conservatism by itself is inadequate.

Reference must be made, every step of the way, to God, the Father Almighty, and His Word, Jesus Christ, breathed out in the Holy Spirit. The battle for the mind that rages in the world today is between ideology, the logos of man’s ideas, and a person, the Person, the divine Logos, the Christ. Man’s ideologies can be packaged as gnostic systems, or as cults, or as religious movements like Islam.

False prophets, also called wolves, abound in every age, especially ours. They are known for their smooth sophistication, beguiling words, mimicry of the Truth and indifference to the will of God. Obedience to the Truth, Who is Jesus, is foreign to them. Their characteristics are self-interest and teaching for gain or prestige or only to transmit their own ideas, to bring men to their private idea of the truth, not the Truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

Most false prophets assume the place of Jesus Christ in subtle ways. Their followers are to bond with them, not with Christ. They end up with a religion of

externals (“Do x, y and z and you will be saved”), and they end up in arrogance and separatism. Islam is a religion of obedience in observing X, Y and Z to get to heaven. Christianity is a relationship of communion with the perfectly obedient Son, who took on our sin, and imputed His righteousness, by dying and rising again.

The Catholic Faith consists in what all Christians have always believed, in every age and in every place. This principle is called the Vincentian Canon, named after St. Vincent of Lerins. “Antiquity, ubiquity and consent,” what has been believed by all Christians, in every age, and in every place. Apart from this Faith there is the lie, leading to intellectual dishonesty, tyranny, bondage, emptiness and the culture of death, all the opposite of the spirit of sonship.

Obedience to Christ brings us perfect freedom. St. Paul found that he was freest when he was the slave of Christ. Obedience to Christ brings us to openness, to surprises and to adventure. Our heavenly Father loves us, and is ordering everything in our lives to draw us closer to Him.

Let us then sweep aside all the obstacles we place in the way of being in love with Him. His Holy Spirit will help us to break the chain reactions of anger, frustration, boredom and fear that would drag us down, and take our loved ones with us. The harder our task might be, the greater the glory we share with Him. The more difficult our role in life may be, the more our Lord will honor our labors. When it is hard to be a Christian, we should regard our difficulties as our glory given to us by God.

We gather now around the Altar of God to receive the heavenly Food which is so profitable for our souls. Here it is that in union with God’s dear Son, we learn the spirit of true sonship.

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The Rt. Rev’d Paul C. Hewett, SSC⁸
July 29, 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 Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Proverbs 11:24-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 7:15-21 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 7:21 (KJV).

⁷ Romans 8:12-17.

⁸ Bishop Ordinary, the Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.