

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the sixth Chapter of Micah:ⁱⁱ

“Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD’s controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

“Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed [SHOWD] thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Philippians:ⁱⁱⁱ

“. . . Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord

greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “He hath shewed [**SHOWD**] thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

At one time or another, we all like to be given clear, simple guidance for correctly doing whatever it may be that we are engaged in at the moment. My text, taken from today’s First Lesson from Micah, is one example of a clear, pithy summary of Scriptural advice, in this case taken from the Old Testament: “[W]hat is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”^v

This reduction of the Biblical message almost to proverb is the more comforting in that this particular “Reader’s Digest Condensed Version” of Revelation is expressly authorized by the very Scripture which it summarizes, for it is, in terms, a part of that very Scripture. You simply cannot have any better authority for producing a sort of “Cliff Notes” on the Bible than to lift the short, memorable texts from the Bible itself.

This it is not surprising that the Bible contains other, similar epitomes, nor that these little gems are particularly prevalent when the Bible is prescribing how we ought to behave. One of the most famous of these is from St. James: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”^{vi}

Another such proverbial phrase, which ought to come readily to the tongue and ear of every faithful Anglican, is something from St. Matthew's Gospel^{vii} that we hear, or at least should hear, every Sunday that the Eucharist is celebrated: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."^{viii}

These three compact expressions are short enough that we could repeat all three of them to ourselves each morning upon getting out of bed. Think what an influence that might have on how we conduct ourselves throughout the following day, if we began that day with the reminder that a few simple attitudes can easily guide us into pleasing God with everything we do that day. If we begin this way, it will be much easier to follow Paul's advice to the Philippians that "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things"^{ix}.

Micah reminds us to be just and to be merciful, both essential components of loving our fellow men and women whom God the Father loved so much that, to adapt Micah's words, He gave His firstborn for our transgression, the fruit of His body for the sin of our souls.

Micah also reminds us to walk humbly with our God, something we can scarcely do without hypocrisy unless we demonstrably love those others whom He loves just as much as He loves us.

St. James gives us two concrete examples of how we should demonstrate that love, each of which implies that we should care for, and visibly show our concern for, the weakest, the most helpless, the most deprived among God's people. He also enjoins us to live a pure life, something which is also necessary if we are, in any sincerity, to follow Micah's urging to walk humbly with God.

St. Matthew quotes Our Lord as explaining the true significance of what Micah and James wrote: We are commanded to love God with all our beings and, as an essential part of that love, to love equally those others whom God also loves.

Notice, however, that when we read these three passages together, we see that this divinely-mandated love for others of which Christ spoke in His Summary of the Law is not a passive emotion of good will or somewhat distant approval. It is a passionate involvement with others, a reaching out to them in their times of need, a determination that they shall not be left lonely, hungry, or sick nor shall they be deprived of justice or mercy.

Conclusion:

The Eucharist is our Great Thanksgiving to Jesus Christ for His giving of Himself to us. Therefore, we cannot be in a frame of mind properly to receive His Body and Blood unless, when we hear His words directed to us, we hear them not as a sonorous background to the Liturgy, lulling us into comfortable somnolence, but as a trumpet call to immediate action:

“Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”^x

--oo0oo--

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister^{xi}
September 13, 2009.

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

ⁱⁱ *Micah 6: 1-8 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Philippians 4: 4-13 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Micah 6: 8 (KJV).*

^v *Micah 6: 8 (KJV).*

^{vi} *St. James 1: 27 (KJV).*

^{vii} *St. Matthew 22: 36-40 (KJV).*

^{viii} *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{ix} *Philippians 4: 8 (KJV).*

^x *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

^{xi} *Priest Associate, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, New Orleans (Metairie), LA. Honorary Canon, The Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.*