

Sermon for Morning Prayer The Sixth Sunday After Trinity

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fifty-seventh Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“... [H]e that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the second Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “[T]hus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

That is one of the verses the American Prayer Book assigns as “opening sentences” for the Office of Morning Prayer,^v setting a suitable devotional tone for an exercise in public worship. It suggests four specific themes that are most suitable for contemplation during such organized public rituals.

Theme:

The first of these pregnant thoughts is that the One Whom we worship is “high and lofty”. That is, He is, in every meaningful sense, above us.

The second such thought is that He whom we worship “inhabits eternity”. Thus He lives outside of the limitations imposed by time and space, which is only to be expected because time and space are themselves only aspects of the physical order which He Himself created.

The third such thought is that He whom we worship is Holy. Very often we give this aspect of His being little thought; it sails past us as just one more ritual incantation, as when we recite at the end of the Preface at Mass, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of thy Glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High. Amen.”^{vi}

The fourth and last such thought is that He whom we worship revives the spirits of the humble and the hearts of the contrite. In other words, the benefits of worship accrue only to those who are properly disposed spiritually.

Development:

A. Our God is “high and lofty”, *i.e.*, is superior to all Creation.

It would make no sense to worship any Person or God Who is not higher and loftier than we are. The prime reason for the spiritual bankruptcy of Paganism,

which made the Classical World such fertile ground for the new Christian Church, was the impotence of idols made by human hands.

In our own time, the same proves true of the disembodied spirits that men and women erect into natural forces to be worshipped, whether those artificial forces be “dialectical materialism” or “social justice”. Whatever they be called, gods that are selected and erected by human minds can have no powers, and therefore no potentialities, greater than those limited humans who created them.

Athena, the protectress of the Athenians – who even took their very name from her patronage of their city-state – was symbolized by an exquisitely beautiful statue, carved of precious materials, and she dwelt in a temple that is still a byword for architectural perfection. However, even centuries of fervent prayers to her and of pious sacrifices to her did not suffice to protect her worshippers from the ravages of plague or the military assaults of the Spartans.^{vii}

B. Our God “inhabits eternity”.

Unless the One Whom we worship is greater than the created order, He cannot assure us of the security and aid for which we pray. Because Christianity makes the unique claim that its God can not only overcome death for Himself but also for His worshippers, it is especially vital for Christians that their God is the master of eternity.

Thus the Psalmist says, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting”^{viii} and “His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued for as long as the sun....”^{ix}

C. Our God is Holy.

Unless the One Whom we worship is Holy, we have no assurance that He will hear or respond to our prayers. The reciprocity that is implied by the very concept of the Covenant requires that each party to that agreement be holy; that is why the Lord instructed the Israelites:

“I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy.... For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”^x

Holiness begins with being dedicated to God and to His service, which we were in our Baptisms. It continues with the life-long struggle to live up to that vocation, principally by trying to abide by His Commandments, receiving His Sacraments, and seeking perfection through His appointed means of Grace.

D. Our God revives the spirits of the humble and the hearts of the contrite.

Although we seldom think of this as an aspect of our religion, it is a unique feature of Christianity that it infuses *hope* in its followers. In fact, one of the marks of how Christianity progressed beyond the pagan world in which it appeared is how it accepted the “Cardinal Virtues” taught by the best of the Pagan philosophers, namely Temperance, Prudence, Justice, and Fortitude, but added to them its own unique “Theological Virtues” of Faith, Hope, and Charity.^{xi}

Even the most developed of the Pagans had nothing to offer in the way of hope; the best the elevated systems of Stoicism and Epicureanism could offer was a sterile sort of passive fatalism, closely akin to the Islamic notion of “kismet”. Only Christians, among all the adherents of all the world’s religions, have reason to look forward to the future with positive anticipation.

That is why we are charged to always be ready to give an account of the hope that is in us,^{xii} for the source of that hope can only be the saving work of Our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Psalmist said, “In thee, O LORD, do I hope; thou wilt hear, O LORD my God.”^{xiii} Hope, the Christian virtue, is both an apologetic for our Faith and a principal tool of our evangelism.

Conclusion:

Thus some of the most important and most characteristic aspects of Christian worship are summed up for us in that “Opening Sentence” that appears in today’s First Lesson: “[T]hus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”^{xiv}

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July 11, 2010.

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- ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (PECUSA 1928).*
- ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 57: 13b-19 (KJV).*
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Timothy 2: 7-13 (KJV).*
- ^{iv} *Isaiah 57: 15 (KJV).*
- ^v *The Order for Daily Morning Prayer, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 3 (PECUSA 1928).*
- ^{vi} *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 77 (PECUSA 1928).*
- ^{vii} *I Kings 18: 25-38.*
- ^{viii} *Psalms 41: 13 (KJV).*
- ^{ix} *Psalms 72: 17 (KJV).*
- ^x *Leviticus 11: 44-45 (KJV).*
- ^{xi} *I Corinthians 13: 13.*
- ^{xii} *I Peter 3: 15.*
- ^{xiii} *Psalms 38: 15 (KJV).*
- ^{xiv} *Isaiah 57: 15 (KJV).*
- ^{xv} *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.*