

# SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER<sup>i</sup>

## Trinity Sunday<sup>ii</sup>

### I. Lessons:<sup>iii</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the forty-third Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.<sup>iv</sup>

“The pride of the height, the clear firmament, the beauty of heaven, with his glorious shew [SHOW]; The sun when it appeareth, declaring at his rising a marvellous instrument, the work of the most High: At noon it parcheth the country, and who can abide the burning heat thereof? A man blowing a furnace is in works of heat, but the sun burneth the mountains three times more; breathing out fiery vapours, and sending forth bright beams, it dimmeth the eyes. Great is the Lord that made it; and at his commandment runneth hastily. He made the moon also to serve in her season for a declaration of times, and a sign of the world. From the moon is the sign of feasts, a light that decreaseth in her perfection. The month is called after her name, increasing wonderfully in her changing, being an instrument of the armies above, shining in the firmament of heaven; The beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, an ornament giving light in the highest places of the Lord. At the commandment of the Holy One they will stand in their order, and never faint in their watches. Look upon the rainbow, and praise him that made it; very beautiful it is in the brightness thereof. It compasseth the heaven about with a glorious circle, and the hands of the most High have bended it. ... We may speak much, and yet come short: wherefore in sum, he is all. How shall we be able to magnify him? for he is great above all his works. The Lord is terrible and very great, and marvellous is his power. When ye glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as ye can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when ye exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough. Who hath seen him, that he might tell us? and who can magnify him as he is? There are yet hid greater things than these be, for we have seen but a few of his works. For the Lord hath made all things; and to the godly hath he given wisdom.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.<sup>v</sup>

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith [SETH], When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

## II. Text:

From the Second Lesson: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>vi</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### III. Introduction and Theme:

Because you are sitting here, listening to this sermon, we all know that you are people who regularly worship according to the 1928 American edition of the traditional Book of Common Prayer that, for more than 460 years, has been such a defining characteristic of Anglicanism.

And if you regularly worship according to the authentic Book of Common Prayer, then by the rule of *lex credendi, lex orandi* – that is, “What you pray becomes what you believe” -- you are almost certainly committed to the maintenance of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Faith – the Faith of the three historic Creeds and of the ancient universal, undivided Church of the Apostles – in its distinctively Anglican expression.

But if you are the sort of classic Catholic with an Anglican orientation that I have just described, and you pay any attention to the Internet or other publications that cover the traditional Anglican scene, then you are likely confused and concerned by the multiplicity of self-described “traditional” or “conservative” communions, jurisdictions, denominations, and bodies that present such a patchwork appearance to any interested observer. You may even be one of those who has, on occasion, been heard to lament, “Why cannot all those, who believe and practice the same things, unify themselves, so as to witness more effectively to the world?”

### IV. Developement:

Nearly everyone who is concerned with this issue has encountered the host of initials and acronyms for the various Anglican, neo-Anglican, or quasi-Anglican church and para-church bodies and associations. A typical string of such initials and acronyms includes ACA,<sup>vii</sup> ACC,<sup>viii</sup> ACNA,<sup>ix</sup> AMiA,<sup>x</sup> APA,<sup>xi</sup> APCK,<sup>xii</sup> CANA,<sup>xiii</sup> DHC,<sup>xiv</sup> EMC,<sup>xv</sup> FACA,<sup>xvi</sup> FiF,<sup>xvii</sup> REC,<sup>xviii</sup> TAC,<sup>xix</sup> or UECNA<sup>xx</sup> – all of which stand for current names and

not even the many past labels or groups which have disappeared. Further, all of these are relatively mainstream rather than just some of the horde of fringe groups.

Such a list speedily shows why some complain of an “alphabet soup” of church entities, both within and without the Archbishop of Canterbury’s old Lambeth association of churches. (That Lambeth association is what we used to call “the Anglican Communion”, until some of its most prominent members began jettisoning essentials that have always marked Anglicanism as Catholic in the ancient sense.)

In contemplating this seemingly chaotic Anglican scene, we can try to make some sense out of the apparent disunity and disorder among those who call themselves “Anglicans”, especially if we recognize is that all of those who assume the label “Anglican”, even all those whose worship uses some traditional version of the Book of Common Prayer, do **not** in fact share the same beliefs and practices.

If you doubt that, ask the members of any such group just two questions and tabulate for yourself the answers given you by members of these different groups. The first of these shibboleths<sup>xxi</sup> is, “What authority do the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion have within your jurisdiction?” The second key question is, “What does your group teach about the nature and operation of the Sacraments? How many are there, and are they subjective or objective channels of Grace?”

Then, too, it is also important to remember that this seemingly hopeless confusion in the “Continuing Anglican” and larger “Anglican” scenes is just a subset of the larger mixture, seemingly a random olio, of communions, jurisdictions, denominations, and groups that litter the field of Christianity in general. Non-Christians – and many Christians, too – are constantly amazed at the number and variety of Christian organizations, many of which are usually squabbling with some of the others or even with almost all of the others.

Of course, those who marvel and despair at this apparent Christian confusion conveniently forget the uneasy and often hostile relations between the four or five major movements within Islam, the two or three distinct streams of Buddhism, the several factions within Hinduism, or the four principal parties and numerous minor sects within Judaism.

The result of this myopic perspective is, all too often, an ill-considered call for “unity”, at any price and upon any terms, whether that unity be conceived on the macro scale as the merger of disparate Christian groups, as in the Churches of South India and of North India, or on the micro scale as the merger of disparate Anglican groups. In either case, these proposals are floated without adequate provision for the real historic reasons that have led to those prospective merger partners’ separate existences.

Equally, such conceptualized mergers, whether macro-scale pan-Christian ones or micro-scale pan-Anglican ones, also overlook the very real and substantive degree of unity that already exists despite the formal distinctions between church corporations or juridical entities.

As St. Paul reminded the Ephesians in today’s Second Lesson, they were, and we are, called to be “[E]ager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”<sup>xxii</sup> Baptism, of course, incorporates each of us into the body of Christ, thus uniting us in a fundamental way with all Christians, even with those who do not themselves believe that Baptism is anything more than a simple sign or mere memorial.

To borrow a phrase that is often used by some with whom we do not agree upon the basics of the Faith, this passage sets forth seven “instruments of unity” among Christians:

**A. We, who are dedicated to Christ in Baptism, are all one Body.**

This profound truth, which has been taught by mainstream Christianity ever since it was first enunciated by St. Paul,<sup>xxiii</sup> is emphasized by the title of a wonderful old introductory text on the Catholic faith: YE ARE THE BODY<sup>xxiv</sup> by Bonnell Spencer. But if we Christians all form what is in God's eyes one body, then we already share a very real unity, despite any institutional or administrative diversity.

**B. We, as Christians, are enlivened and guided by one Holy Spirit.**

All orthodox Christians – that is “orthodox” with a lower case “o” – are baptized into the Church in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>xxv</sup> And notice that familiar phrase is in the *Name*, singular, of the Persons of the Trinity, not in their *Names*, plural.

In this Sacrament, it is the Third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, Who acts in that Sacrament and makes us members of Christ,<sup>xxvi</sup> even when the celebrant of that Baptism does not accurately understand what the Church has always done in that Sacrament.<sup>xxvii</sup> Further, Our Lord promised us, and the Church has always believed, that it is the Holy Spirit Who enlivens<sup>xxviii</sup> and guides<sup>xxix</sup> the Church<sup>xxx</sup> so as to keep it from all essential error.

Thus, as St. Paul reminds the Ephesians, all who have received the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and who are thereby incorporated into that Church which the Holy Spirit invigorates and watches over, already share among themselves a very essential form of unity.

**C. We Christians hold fast to one hope of eternal salvation.**

Several noticeable characteristics mark Christians off as different from the rest of humanity. Of these, one of the principal ones is their hope that, with the Lord's help, they will surmount death<sup>xxxix</sup> and be resurrected<sup>xxxix</sup> in their bodies.<sup>xxxix</sup> Pagans and unbelievers have no such hope, or any other defense against the pains and disappointments of this uncertain physical life.

Thus it is that the two most ethical and admirable of the pagan philosophical systems, Stoicism and Epicureanism, could offer their adherents nothing better than the advice to avoid pain and disappointment, essentially by withdrawing themselves from most forms of social and political engagement. Thus, too, it is that St. Peter exhorts us to "Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you...."<sup>xxxix</sup>

In contrast, as Christians, we share the sure and certain hope of the resurrection, something that distinguishes us from the non-Christian world so sharply that it effectively unifies all who possess it.

#### **D. We Christians acknowledge one Lord over us and over His Church.**

Scripture attests to the Lordship of the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, Jesus Christ, over the world,<sup>xxxv</sup> over His Church,<sup>xxxvi</sup> and, therefore, over us who are the members of that Church.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Furthermore, we acknowledge that Lordship each time we recite one of the three historic Creeds of the Church.

And where all Christians acknowledge that they are the subjects of the same Lord, who can reasonably deny that they are united in that allegiance?

#### **E. We Christians adhere to the basic principles of one Faith.**

We have already mentioned the three historic statements of the Faith of the Church, the Nicene, Apostles', and Athanasian

Creeds. Historically, the entire Church, both East and West, adhered to the Nicene Creed and the entire Western Church adhered to the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds as well. The entire Household of the Faith – the Catholic Church to which those Creeds refer – has always deemed them to be sufficient statements of the minimal beliefs that a faithful Christian must hold.

But if all Christians must believe, at bottom, the same essential things, then we are already united in the bases of our Faith and beliefs, however much we may differ on some of the minor details of that Faith or in our practices.

#### **F. We Christians are incorporated into Our Lord's Body through one Baptism.**

Previously, we mentioned that the Holy Spirit is the One who acts in the Sacrament of Baptism.<sup>xxxviii</sup> There is only one valid form of Baptism, that where either the baptizand is immersed in water or water is poured over the baptizand, while the celebrant pronounces that the subject is being baptized in the Name—again, *Name* singular--of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost – or Holy Spirit.<sup>xxxix</sup>

While some Christians have departed from the traditional understanding of what Baptism means, or of how essential it is to the Christian life, no one reasonably disputes that this, and this alone, is what the Church has always recognized as this Sacrament.

Where all Christians thus share this one unmistakable rite of entrance into our Faith, we also share unity on this essential point.

#### **G. We Christians acknowledge the sovereignty of one God and Father of us all.**



Scripture attests to the Fatherhood of the First Person of the Trinity, God the Father and Creator.<sup>xi</sup> Furthermore, as is the case with the other two Persons of the Trinity, we acknowledge God the Father each time we recite one of the three historic Creeds of the Church.

And where all Christians acknowledge that they are the children of the same Father, they are necessarily united in one divine family.

## V. Conclusion:

Thus, whether we are considering the larger issue of the apparent fragmentation of Christendom or the nearer one of the apparent fragmentation of traditional Anglicanism, we would do well to reflect on the seven essential aspects of unity that St. Paul set before the Ephesians in today's Second Lesson. When we do so, we must see that we are already far more unified than is otherwise suggested by our disagreements or disparities in practice.

Once we realize that we already have important forms of unity, we may be in a better frame of mind to continue to abide by, and to seek ever increasingly to exemplify, Paul's urgent injunction: "I, therefore, ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."<sup>xli</sup>

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister<sup>xlii</sup>  
May 13, 2010

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<sup>i</sup> "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).

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from a sermon for Morning Prayer on Ascension Day, May 13, 2010.

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- <sup>iii</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).
- <sup>iv</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* 43:1-12, 27-33 (KJV).
- <sup>v</sup> *Ephesians* 4:1-16 (KJV).
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ephesians* 4: 1-3 (RSV).
- <sup>vii</sup> *The Anglican Church in America, which is the U.S. representative of the TAC.*
- <sup>viii</sup> *The Anglican Catholic Church, one of the original “St. Louis” or “Continuing Anglican” Churches of 1977-78.*
- <sup>ix</sup> *The Anglican Church of North America, a name which was initially used by the ACC and is now used by North American aspirants to Lambeth Communion membership who organized themselves as a new Province in 2009.*
- <sup>x</sup> *The Anglican Mission in America, a 2000 – i.e., post-St. Louis – secession from PECUSA.*
- <sup>xi</sup> *The Anglican Province of America, a 1995 secession from the ACA.*
- <sup>xii</sup> *The Anglican Province of Christ the King, one of the three “St. Louis” Churches of 1977-78.*
- <sup>xiii</sup> *The Convocation of Anglicans in North America, a 2006 – i.e., another post-St. Louis – secession from PECUSA.*
- <sup>xiv</sup> *The Diocese of the Holy Cross, a secession ca. 2005 from the APCK.*
- <sup>xv</sup> *The Episcopal Missionary Church, a 1992 – i.e., post-St. Louis – secession from PECUSA.*
- <sup>xvi</sup> *The Federation of Anglican Churches in the Americas, a para-church fellowship.*
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Forward in Faith, a para-church fellowship which has two branches, FiF-NA or Forward in Faith – North America, and FiF-UK. Despite its not being an actual church jurisdiction, it has “elected” and obtained consecration for at least two bishops who were identified as being consecrated for FiF, just as though it possessed both jurisdiction and mission.*
- <sup>xviii</sup> *The Reformed Episcopal Church, an 1873 – and thus pre-St. Louis – secession from PECUSA that formed in opposition to the growing influence of the Oxford Movement.*
- <sup>xix</sup> *The Traditional Anglican Communion, which is the international arm of the ACA.*
- <sup>xx</sup> *The United Episcopal Church of North America, a 1981 secession from the ACC which is therefore regarded as one of the three “St. Louis” Churches.*
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Cf. Judges* 12: 5-6.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ephesians* 4: 3-6 (RSV).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ephesians* 1: 22-23; 5: 30; *Colossians* 1: 18.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Society of the Holy Cross, 1990 (rev. ed. 1997).*
- <sup>xxv</sup> *St. Matthew* 28: 19.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *St. Matthew* 3: 11; cf. *St. John* 1: 33, 3: 5, 6: 63, and *Acts* 11: 16; FRANCIS J. HALL AND FRANK HUDSON HALLOCK, *THEOLOGICAL OUTLINES* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 217, 253 (Wipf & Stock Publishers 2004).

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- <sup>xxvii</sup> *HALL AND HALLOCK, op. cit. 252-53.*
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *St. Luke 12: 12; Acts 1: 5 & 8.*
- <sup>xxix</sup> *St. John 14: 16-17, 14: 26, 15: 26.*
- <sup>xxx</sup> *HALL AND HALLOCK, op cit. 218-20.*
- <sup>xxxi</sup> *St. John 11: 25.*
- <sup>xxxii</sup> *St. John 6: 40.*
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> *Acts 23: 6 & 26: 6-7; cf. Romans 5: 2 & 15: 4; Galatians 5: 5; Colossians 1: 5; Titus 1: 2.*
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> *I Peter 3: 15 (RSV).*
- <sup>xxxv</sup> *St. Matthew 28: 18.*
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> *St. Luke 1: 32-33.*
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> *II Peter 1: 11.*
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> *See Section IV.B. supra.*
- <sup>xxxix</sup> *HALL AND HALLOCK, op. cit. 252-53.*
- <sup>xl</sup> *Cf. St. Matthew 5: 45, 7: 11, 10:20 & 10: 32; St. Mark 8: 38 & 11: 25; St. Luke 10: 21-22 & 23: 46; St. John 1: 14.*
- <sup>xli</sup> *Ephesians 4: 1-3 (RSV).*
- <sup>xlii</sup> *Priest Associate, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, 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.*