

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹

The Sunday Next Before Advent

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

“And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁴

“But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth [SHOW-eth] him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew [SHOW] him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Today is the Sunday Next before Advent, the last Sunday of the Church Year that is ending. Of course, that new Year will commence next week, with the First Sunday in Advent, that is, in the time dedicated to Our Lord's Coming. So this is an appropriate time to give some thought to just Who, and What, it is for Whose Coming we will be waiting.

Our Second Lesson today is a discourse by Jesus Christ on His relationship, as the Second Person of the Trinity, that is, as God the Son, to the First Person of that Trinity, God the Father.⁶ The two are equal in their divine status and they work in concert to bring humanity to the ends to which God has appointed it.

This concept of the Trinity is at once one of the most puzzling and complex in all of Christian belief but, at the same time, one of the simplest in Christian practice. We could spend years in contemplation and analysis of Our Lord's statements and the other Scriptural references to this topic, without ever reaching much more of an understanding than that God is the Creator of all, Who from time to time appears to us as one of three distinct Persons and Who loves us and cares for us.

And, indeed, scholars have actually spent such years and have, indeed, failed to come up with anything more than that simple formula: God is the Creator of all, Who from time to time appears to us as one of three distinct Persons and Who loves us and cares for us.

Yet at the same time, those truths are so profound that they are a fully-sufficient basis for our devotional lives. All we need, to live as Christians, is to accept those facts that God has chosen to reveal to us, and then to act on them. In order to fulfill our proper tasks, we have no need whatever to inquire into the internal division of labor among the Three Persons of the Trinity or to attain to any real knowledge of their internal economy, and that is a very good thing, because all such inquiries are doomed to frustration and all such knowledge is well beyond us.

There is an expression that originates in the military services and that sums up the concept that something must be referred to higher authority. It goes, “That’s above my pay grade.” Well, how God chooses to accomplish God’s work is far above my pay grade or yours, and further, it is something we can safely leave in His most competent hands.

Our responsibility, as Christians, is, in a current phrase, “to live out” what God has chosen to reveal to us. That means we cannot leave the truths of Christianity as arcane data in the pages of seldom-visited books but, instead, must take those data and incorporate them into the fabric of our daily lives. We must live as Christians, worship as Christians, and, as Christians, share our Faith with the whole world.

Conclusion:

And, in our efforts to do those things, we have only to ask in order to receive the all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present assistance of God the Father, the Creator, of God the Son, the Savior, and of God the Holy Spirit, the Strengtheners. And if we ask for that assistance, and allow it to work in our lives, then, as St. John records,

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”⁷

This is why Isaiah, the great prophet of the coming of the Messiah, declares in today’s First Lesson:

“Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”⁸

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister JD⁹
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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 *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xli (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ *Isaiah 25:1-9 (KJV).*

⁴ *St. John 5:17-29 (KJV).*

⁵ *St. John 5:24 (KJV).*

⁶ Donald Guthrie, *John*, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, eds., *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED*, 3rd Ed. 941 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970).

⁷ *St. John 5:24 (KJV).*

⁸ *Isaiah 25:9 (KJV).*

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