

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Quinquagesima Sunday¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the tenth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. ... For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude.

“Therefore thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, alway.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the thirty-first Verse of the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁵

“Then Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets

concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

“And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.”*⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

“Why must you go on and on and on about that? Can’t you just let it go?”

How many of you have at one time or another been told you should quit talking about something that moved you deeply? How many have been cautioned that they should be quiet and just accept things as they are?

It is said that the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and it could as well be said that he or she who continues to insist on telling the Good News will earn not grease, but the salve of salvation. Those who continue to call upon Jesus Christ as their savior may find opposition from the world, but they will earn eternal rewards.

This theme of remaining true to essential truth and not being dissuaded by those who would silence you is one oft-repeated not only in Scripture, but in literature and philosophy. Just last week, we heard the parable tale told by our Lord of the seed that falls either on good ground, where it can grow and flourish, or in less hospitable places where it may spring up, but it soon withers and dies. We never want to be that short-lived vine, but the strong, healthy vine that continues to grow, to flourish and to produce good fruit.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, we read of a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus to beg Him to heal her daughter. When He initially declined, pointing out that He was first to minister to the Jews, she persisted in calling upon Him to help her. She did not give up, nor did she shrink from the initial rejection, but she continued to push forward in faith: "*Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*"⁷ At her entreaties, Jesus was moved to help her and granted her request that her daughter be cured of a devil.

St. Paul later admonished the Thessalonians to "Pray without ceasing."⁸ He told them to pray not for a short time, not just until the issue at hand is resolved, but without ceasing. Remember what prayer is. Prayer is the reflection of an on-going relationship. It is our side in a continuing discussion between ourselves and God. It is part of our re-

sponse to a loving, forgiving Savior. Prayer is our chance to express our own hopes, concerns, joys, disappointments, fears and exultations.

Prayer is not a dead recitation of beautiful words written in a book, words that have no real connection to our world. It is a living, breathing, ever-changing dynamic in our relationship, and therefore should always reflect that which is important, current and meaningful to us. Our Lord speaks to us through His creation and His Gospels. We speak to Him in our prayers.

This idea came fortuitously to me just before I received several emails this week from fellow clergy around our diocese. Father Pete Windham, of St. Michael's, Panama City, Florida, sent out an email containing some thoughts in preparation for our upcoming Diocesan Synod and Electoral Synod, at which we will attempt to discern who the Holy Spirit may be calling to be the next Bishop Ordinary of this diocese.⁹ Obviously, this is a time for deep reflection upon our current states, spiritual, financial, and administrative.

Father Windham laments what he sees as the “unhealthy” spiritual state of our diocese, which he sees as being rooted in our lack of Christian commitment. He questions what we must do to heal our diocese, and to attract people into our pews and to our faith. How, he asks, can we be, the Church that our Lord wants us to be?

As he notes, our liturgy and our message are sound. Sadly, however, only a few of us assist at that liturgy or hear that message, and that number will remain small until we remember that our Faith is about relationships and we start to act on that reality. We are called to be a family, and the family extends far further than we can even imagine.

Remember the words of our Lord: “*Thou shall 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 shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*”¹⁰

If we believe this affirmation, then surely we would have our neighbors, friends, and family, know and enjoy the same love, security and salvation of Jesus Christ that we know. If we would have them know the same peace, then we must take an active part in bringing the message to them in the form of the Gospel, and bringing them to the living celebration of that message which is the Holy Eucharist. Father Windham's email went on to describe some of what his parish is doing to share that message in its community. St. Michael's¹¹ is participating in an examination of what it means to be a Christian, and how the Anglican Catholic Church exemplifies that objective.

Other parishes take different approaches to accomplish the same goal. St. Peter's Church¹² sponsors a nursing home ministry. Others, such as Holy Angels, Picayune, Mississippi, also take part in ministry to the elderly and shut-ins. Each and every project that we take on must be the product of a prayerful examination of how we can spread the word to the entire world as we are charged to do. We cannot rest on just having a building with and a sign outside and a worship service inside. We must take the next step.

Remember that we are the servants of the nobleman in the parable who was ready for the marriage feast and sent his servants into the streets to bring guests to the dinner. We are still in the Pre-Lenten season, and as we prepare for our time of introspection and self-evaluation, let's all remember to be in prayer for the health of our diocese, our church and our nation.

Let us be the squeaky wheel of prayer, continuously raised. Let us not ever "let it go", but rather remain ever devoted to our faith, our Church and our God and continuously be active in that devotion through prayer, and fasting and action.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, have mercy on us, thou Son of David. Guide us now in thy ways. Inspire in us wisdom to bring others to thy faith through the Gospel and to thy table in worship. Give us a discerning mind to follow those paths which are the most productive for thy kingdom, Lord. This we ask of thy divine guidance, O Lord. *Amen.*

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW¹³

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Quinquagesima Sunday, 2013.

² *Psalsms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Deuteronomy 10:12-15, 17-11:1 (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Luke 18:31-43 (KJV).

⁶ St. Luke 18:35-39 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 15:25. (KJV).

⁸ I Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV).

⁹ *I.e.*, The Diocese of New Orleans of The Anglican Catholic Church.

¹⁰ St. Matthew 22:36-38 (KJV), quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 (KJV), together with St. Luke 10:26-28 (KJV), which form “The Summary of the Law”, The Book of Common Prayer, p. 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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