

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

Sexagesima Sunday

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourth Verse of the fiftieth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱ

“... The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

“The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

“For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

“Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians.ⁱⁱⁱ

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into

paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson:

"He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

"Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."^{iv}

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Who indeed can contend with those who plainly speak the Word of God? The word of God is Truth, and it is eternal. Isaiah here throws down his proverbial gauntlet to those who would condemn him for his preaching and prophesying. As Isaiah notes, the end for those who try to prevent the preaching of the Word is utter failure and desolation.

We may certainly be bold in this assurance. As Isaiah depends on the support and defense of God, so too do we. Consider how Isaiah defends himself, and all believers, from the attacks against him.

“He is near that justifieth me.” God is near. Isaiah states this comforting truth with a powerful simplicity and directness. Not only is God near me, but He justifies me. I need not justify myself, Isaiah says. Isaiah was, no doubt, accused of many evil things during his work, just as Jesus Christ would later be by the Pharisees. But as was the case with Jesus, the accusations are unfounded.

Absolutely unafraid, Isaiah almost dares his accusers to come forward: *“Let us stand together: who is mine adversary? Let him come near to me.”*

Even to a child on the playground this challenge is clear. If you have something to say, step forward. Who will accuse me? Let him come forward and say what he has to say. This is a direct challenge. Whether in debate, or in physical combat, I will not back down, I will not run away. I depend on the strength and truth of God.

The judge who heard the case against Jesus Christ admitted he could find no fault in Him—to the contrary, even declaring Jesus a righteous man. Isaiah claims the same assurance. His confidence in his own righteousness is even clearer in his next sentence: *“Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?”*

God is on my side, Isaiah claims. He will help me. He will stand by me and support me. He will defend me. He will uphold me and give me freedom and victory. Compared to God's power, who can stand? Isaiah here defends the work of all ministers of the Gospel, all who preach the truth, all who clearly, openly, honestly tell God's word. These people cannot be stopped, or beaten, or confounded, as they have God by their side.

The enemies of the Gospel will strive by all means to prevent this work. They will accuse, they will mislead, they will tell falsehoods. But in the end, everything they do will come to naught. There was a musical a few years ago that had a title that spoke to this reality: "Your Arms Are Too Short To Box With God."

Those who tell the truth operate in the light. Those who try to prevent the telling of truth hide in darkness. That is why Isaiah's challenge is so daunting to them. They fear being brought out in the light. So Isaiah asks, "*Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me?*"

During His ministry, various opponents tried to debate with Jesus and each of them He overwhelmed with His truth to the point that they could no longer answer Him. Isaiah suggests that the same is true of ministers who preach and teach the word of God honestly and clearly. These ministers need not fear contradiction. As for those who try such contradiction, Isaiah notes their ignominious end: "*Lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*"

This is not the promise of resurrection, or of salvation for the enemy of the Gospel. It is the utter futility of those who are proven impotent and irrelevant. While the supporters of the Gospel shall live forever, the enemies of that Gospel will be destroyed as stored clothes are by insects. And in the end, it will be Jesus Christ Himself who will judge them for their disbelief.

Isaiah then calls upon all those who know and understand the Gospel to believe it even when their lives seem most desperate and forlorn: "*Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the*

voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.”

If you fear, respect and love the Lord, and you obey the commands of Jesus Christ, even if you find life difficult and dark, stay faithful. Even if you think you are losing hope, still trust in God. Never give up and never lose faith, Isaiah cautions.

Finally, Isaiah addresses those who set themselves up as their own gods, who “worship” reason, or traditions, or doctrines of men, or anything other than Jesus Christ, who is Himself the Light of the World: *“Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled.”*

If you refuse to worship and trust in God; if you deceive yourself into believing that you do not need God; if you wish to worship yourself in this way, then do so—and you will have only your own light, not the Light of the World eternal to light your way. You will not be justified, nor will you be righteous, Isaiah warns: *“This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.”*

If you do this, you can depend on being condemned, the prophet says. Reject righteousness and trust in yourself, and you will surely utterly fail. Instead of being justified, which Isaiah says he is, you will be in sin and will die in sin, to be lost forever to God.

But it need not be so. Remember what Isaiah said? *“Behold, the Lord God will help me.”*

This assistance is always at the ready and always available to the Christian. We need but to call upon His name and He is there. This is the promise of God. As the Psalmist joyfully proclaims, *“O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.”*

The strength of our salvation is the strength of the Lord. It is that of God and God alone. As Isaiah knew and so confidently proclaimed, *“He is near who justifieth me.”* This is not just true for Isaiah; it is true

also for us. As long as we remain true to Jesus Christ, and to the Gospels, then He is near Who justifies us. That assurance can only bring joy and rejoicing to all the Lord's people. As Isaiah says:

“... Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.”^v

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, grant to each of us that same assurance that Your prophet Isaiah had when he said, “Behold, the Lord God will help me”. Keep us always mindful of the truth and strength with which You uphold and cover us. Grant to us each that joy and exultation that allows us all to cry out and shout the truth of Your presence with us and to praise Your will in all things. In Jesus' name we pray. *Amen.*

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

ⁱⁱ *Isaiah 50:4-11 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *II Corinthians 12:1-12 (KJV).*

^{iv} *Isaiah 50:8-11 (KJV).*

^v *Isaiah 12:2-6 (KJV).*

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