

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹ The Eighth Sunday after Trinity²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-fourth Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Proverbs.⁴

“... There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith [**SETH**] unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Homily:

We live in a world that is often dangerous and sinful, full of threats not only to our physical well-being, but to our spiritual health as well. It is a world full of lying teachers of false doctrines who seek, either through their own evil intentions or through the wiles of the devil, to spread sin.

From national leaders who proclaim “hope and change” while endeavoring at every turn to damage the Church of God, to the almost mindless followers of popular whims who promote the destruction of innocent life, and even to those who proclaim to be ministers of God who promote a doctrine foreign to everything our Lord teaches, we are surrounded on every side by purveyors of evil.

We remain on the lonely path of God only through His Grace and a fixed determination to stay faithful to His Gospel, reinforced by a continuous re-examination of our faith and lives through sharp eyes provided by the Sacred Tradition as preserved and transmitted by the Church.

Consider the case of a national leader who directs the legal mechanisms of the state to stamp out any reflection of or reference to our national history of faith and devotion to God. Whether that be the removal of monuments, displays and memorials to our nation’s grounding in Christian faith, or the command that even ministers of the Gospel are not to pray in the Name of Jesus Christ at public services, or the persecution of those who preach historic Christian beliefs under the pretence that those beliefs are “hate speech”, to the public promotion of doctrines whose core tenets are diametrically opposed to our own, all while that same self-proclaimed “leader” remains deafeningly silent when called upon to celebrate our

own authentic national and cultural traditions. Such a leader can only be seen as, at the very best, a duplicitous wolf which masquerades in sheep's clothing.

Consider those lost persons who continue to promote the slaughter of the innocent in the form of abortion in our country. Even when faced with graphic, horrifying images of the reality of this mass murder of the unborn, they continue to cling to empty phrases like "freedom to choose", when the stark reality is that the only choice they make in such cases is death.

When confronted with the reality of what they do, the supporters of the pro-death movement resort to calling those who promote life misogynist, as if saving lives could be an act against women.

Then there are the ministers of their own personal gospels who promote false and alien doctrines. Some suggest that the proper life for a Christian is to hate others and celebrate those others' deaths. One so-called "church" spends its time travelling around the country protesting at the funerals of fallen military heroes to promote that group's own sick agenda of hate and its perverted version of Christian moral teaching. Turning the Gospel of Jesus Christ on its head, they carry signs suggesting that God hates various people with whom they disagree, and rains down death on the innocent to punish the nation for what these bigots believe to be others' transgressions.

Other similar false prophets suggest an almost Pharisaical self-congratulation in the development of excessive wealth and opulence. You know God loves you, they suggest, if you have more money than anyone else. As their "proof" of their own importance, they point to their success in terms of the world's measure of riches. They ignore, in the process, Jesus' caution not to put one's faith and hope in the world's measure of wealth, but instead to lay up treasures in heaven, where rust and moth do not corrupt.

Our Lord referred to all of these as "*ravening wolves*" which "*come to you in sheep's clothing.*" They may appear to be doing God's work to the casual observer. They may offer what sound at first to be reasonable explanations and justifications for their behavior and teaching.

In the end, however, they prove to be those “*ravening wolves*” to which Jesus referred. They are hungry to see the downfall of God’s people by destroying their faith and their relationship with and trust in God. God’s way is outdated, they will say. The Church needs to “get with the times.” “The world has changed,” they counsel. But they are wrong: perhaps the world has changed, but God has not.

The Church is operating in God’s time, not on earthly time. It is the world, not the Church, which needs to adjust its clock. God does not need to change to fit His creation. The creation must return to and reframe itself in conformity to God’s fashion.

False prophets teach false doctrines. False prophets tell lies dressed up as the truth in order to mislead hearers into following deception. The motive is to rob those hearers of their heavenly treasures by distracting them with earthly baubles.

How do we tell the difference between the false and true prophet? “*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*” The Scriptures, properly understood, tell one consistent story of God’s relationship to and demands upon humankind. So it any teach that which is opposed to the Gospel, then they struggle to deceive. If such people pretend to speak for God, but their lives and actions speak otherwise, then they are false prophets; as St. John warned us, “*the truth is not in them.*” They may dress in fine clothes, but if their doctrines are false, then they are corrupt trees that can bring forth only evil fruit.

Let us pray.

O GRACIOUS Father, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church; that thou wouldest be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of him who died and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*⁷

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The Rev. Larry Wagoner, MSW⁸
July 21, 2013

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 This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 2013.

³ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁴ Proverbs 11:24-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Matthew 7:15-21 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 7:15-16 (KJV).

⁷ *Prayers For The Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 37 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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