

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
The Sunday after Ascension Day¹

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirtieth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.³

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee. And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers: If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are

written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Or,

Here beginneth the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Fifth Book of Moses, called Deuteronomy.⁴

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo [**KNEE-bow**], to the top of Pisgah [**PIZZ-gah**], that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed [**SHOWD**] him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naph-

tali [**NAFF-tuh-lye**], and the land of Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**], and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar [**ZOE-urr**]. And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor [**beth-PEA-are**]: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

“And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

“And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

“And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh [**FAY-row**], and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed [**SHOWD**] in the sight of all Israel.”

Or,

Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the sixty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.⁵

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice

of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith [SETH] the LORD."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁶

"... But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew [SHOW] you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of

PROPOSED IN 1928 38 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxi (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (CIPBC 1963).

³ Deuteronomy 30:1-end (KJV).

⁴ Deuteronomy 34:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Isaiah 65:17-end (KJV).

⁶ St. John 16:5-end (KJV).

⁷ That is, in Jacobean English, "the Strengtheners".

money and our skills and all the other things that He has given us.

I would suggest to you that it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to offer all those things to God. Just as He makes Christ present to us, so He makes us present to Christ. He joins us together with Christ in baptism and He joins us with Christ in this Sacrament in answer to our prayer “that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.”

Jesus says in today’s Second Lesson that The Holy Spirit will take what is His and reveal it to us. He will also take what is ours and present it to Christ, if we will allow it.

There is an old hymn, often sung in black churches, that asks, “Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid? Your heart does the Spirit control?”

The hymn goes on to say, “You can only be blest and have peace and sweet rest as you yield him your body and soul.”

Brothers and sisters, do not resist the Holy Spirit. Do not argue with the Holy Spirit. Do not withhold any part of your life from Him. God lays His Son on this altar for you every time we ask Him to. What will you lay on the altar for Him?

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

May 6, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel at Mass for the Fourth Sunday after Easter, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS

mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew [SHOW] it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith [SETH], A little while? we cannot tell what he saith [SETH]. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew [SHOW] you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and

shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The Gospel for the day is part of a long farewell address that Jesus delivered to His disciples before the events of Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day. In it, He talks about the Holy Spirit in the context of what is about to happen. He says that He is about to go away, by which He means He will ascend to The Father, but that He will still be available to His disciples because The Spirit “will take what is mine and ... reveal it to you.”

This passage is St. John’s version of the short farewell address at the end of St. Matthew’s Gospel in which Jesus promises to be with His disciples “always, until the end of the world.”

The idea is that the Holy Spirit will enable us to experience the presence of Christ after the Ascension. That is perhaps the primary function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.

We call the Holy Spirit “The Lord and Giver of Life.” We call him “the Comforter.”⁷ We call Him “The Counselor.” He is all of the things because He makes Jesus present to us. The Good Shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness, beside still waters. He restores our souls by His own death and gives us life everlasting life.

In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Stephen delivers a stinging sermon before the Jewish authorities, for which he is condemned and stoned to death. But the text says, “He, full of the

Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” The Holy Spirit made Jesus present to Him in the hour of his death.

In the book of Revelation, St. John says, “I was in the Spirit on the Lords Day.” The first thing he sees is a vision of Jesus in His Glory standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks, which represent the seven churches to which He has something to say.

The same Spirit makes Jesus present and reveals Him to us when we pray, and when we gather together to read and to hear His written word. He makes Christ present in the bread and wine when the priest calls upon God “to bless and sanctify by [his] word and Holy Spirit” the food and drink God has created and given to us.

We call this Sacrament by a variety of names. We call it “the Mass” from the Latin word for a dismissal, which is said when the service is over. We call it “The Lord’s Supper” because it was instituted by Jesus at His final meal with the Apostles before His death. We call it “The Eucharist” from the Greek word for giving thanks. And we call it “Holy Communion” for a very good reason. Communion implies a mutual give and take, and this Sacrament involves a mutual give and take between us and God.

God gives us Himself, and we, if we, are truly grateful for that gift, give ourselves in return: “our souls and bodies” as we say in the prayer of consecration.

Do we really do that? Or are we merely takers of what God gives us, offering nothing in return?

It is true that we have nothing to offer that God has not first given to us, except for our sins. And God stands ready to receive them also along with our time and our energy and our