

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER
Quinquagesima Sunday¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Chapter of the Third Book of Moses, called Leviticus.³

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

“...

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

“Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

“And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

“Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

“Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour; I am the LORD.

“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventh Verse of the fourth Chapter of the First Epistle General of St. John.⁴

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and

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The Rev. Mr. Larry Wagoner MSW⁹
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Epistle for Mass on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

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

³ Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 (KJV).

⁴ I John 4:1-end (KJV).

⁵ I John 4:7-12 (RSV).

⁶ “The Summary of the Law”, *The Order for The Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943). This is a conflation of the slightly different quotations found in St. Matthew 22:37 (KJV), St. Mark 12:30 (KJV), and St. Luke 10:27 (KJV), all of which are based upon Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁷ St. John 15:13 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 3:16 (KJV).

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the Father extended to us the chance that we might live through Him, restored to holiness and our relationship as the very children of God.

In the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the proof of the worth of the human soul in the eyes of God. How else could He have suffered the agony of the Cross, and the sorrows of His blessed death and passion for us? How can the value of this gift ever be understood? In short, it cannot, save by this: *“for God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in Him might not die, but have everlasting life.”*⁸

And if we have been given this gift beyond all compare, then we owe to Him who gave it to us that we do as He commanded us: *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”*

We do this to demonstrate His Holy Spirit within us and to do our very best to live as His children. We can truly do no less. *“No man hath seen God at any time,”* says St. John, but if we act as His children and show the love to others that we are commanded to show, then others can see God in us.

This is because *“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us.”* He also then acts through us, using us as His tools and representatives in the world. Then is God’s love *“perfected in us,”* states St. John. When we love others as God wills us to, then we show God’s perfect love in our lives.

Let us pray,

O loving Father, who in Your incomparable love for us gave Your only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ to suffer and die to save us, help us always to show forth that same love to all Your creation in our hearts and lives. Let us thereby demonstrate that we are indeed Your children in the world. This we pray through Your Son, our Lord’s sacrifice of love for us. *Amen.*

God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”*⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In today’s Second Lesson, we are given a challenge and a goal for which to strive. As we meet that challenge, we begin to understand the nature of God. It is the nature of God to love us, and it is our highest calling to love God in direct return and, in indirect return, to love all His creation.

St. John exhorts us all: *“Beloved, let us love one another.”* Let us each hold each other in the highest esteem, in bonds of affection and respect. It is so easy to find reasons to hold each other in contempt, or in disregard. We often find the sil-

liest reasons to dislike each other: “My neighbor has absolutely the ugliest flowers in his yard.” “I really hate people who drive too slowly.” Or even one of my favorites: “How could anyone support the Falcons?”

But St. John reminds us that love is of God, and that “*He who loves is born of God and knows God.*” That is because our Lord has taught us first and foremost to love one another. This teaching came both by word and deed. So He said: “*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.*”⁶ The Lord is our Creator, our very Maker. It is He who gives us life. It is He who makes possible our salvation through the forgiveness of our sin.

Had we abstained from sin in the first place, and not been separated from God, then we all would still live in a state of perfect love and acceptance of each other and of God. Sadly, we did not do so; we rebelled against God in the Fall, and God’s love for us that permits forgiveness became necessary for us to be reconciled with Him.

In order to make that forgiveness possible, the Father gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to come and live as a man and to die as one of us—but not the death of the fulfilled old life, but death on the Cross. Our Lord consented to that death and came to live among us as a man, willingly submitting Himself to all the shame, hypocrisy and evil of the world as He taught His disciples, then even went willingly to the Cross to redeem us.

Parents, ask yourselves: which of you could consent to such a thing? Which parent here would be willing to allow his or her only child to die, innocent but in agony, as a criminal, to save others who were not innocent but were, unlike Him,

guilty? Children, ask yourselves: which of you would be willing to do such a thing?

St. John in His Gospel offered that “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*”⁷ Only someone who truly understands the loving mercy of God could even think of such a thing.

Love, St. John says, is of God. Love comes from and is created and made possible by God. When we show love to others, we demonstrate that we are God’s own, as love can only come when we know God. Also, as love is a godly trait, when we show love to others, we ourselves become more like God. Alternately, when we show hate, envy or malice, we are showing those things which we get from the evil of the world, which God abhors. But love restores us to God, because it is God’s command that we show love to others.

It is worthwhile to draw a distinction here between the kinds of love. The ancient Greeks had four distinct words for love, and they refer to different kinds of love. True, unconditional, sacrificial love such as that between God and man, and reciprocated between man and God, is *agape*. It is the widest, most fulfilling of loves. It is generally *agape* to which the Gospel refers when it uses the word “love”. *Eros* is that passion felt between lovers, and generally refers to a physical longing. *Philia* is friendship or a general love between members of groups, family members or others. Finally, *storge* is natural familial love, expected as part of a relationship.

Without God, *agape* is not possible, though certainly positive feelings towards family, friends and lovers might exist. But as St. John says, “*He that loveth not, knoweth not God.*” Without love, one cannot know God, for God is love. If there were ever need of proof that God is love, St. John states, the proof is found in the Father’s sending His only begotten Son to save His creation from its own sin. There can never be any greater proof of God’s love than this. By the gift of His Son,