

## Easter 3

I take as my text today, from the First Epistle General of St. Peter:

***Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake....***

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

***“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake...”***

On the face of it, this statement seems to be contradictory to our western culture but more importantly to the very nature of Christianity. But is it?

If it were so contrary to Christianity as we understand it, would such a directive have come from one of the Apostles, especially the chief of the Apostles, Peter himself?

For a moment, consider that we live in a very real, material world: what we face in our daily lives is for the most part tangible.

It was no different for the Apostles; they, too, understood that they lived in a material world, and they, too, were concerned with the tangible.

For a Christian, the world then, as today, offered tremendous challenges, just being of the world, but not part of it, set apart spiritually, but surrounded by the material.

So, now we come to the Epistle and Gospel passages appointed for today, seemingly contrary, one to the other; however, when viewed from the perspective of one providing guidance for living in a material world, and the other preparing us for the spiritual world, we can see how they might complement each other, and open our understanding of what it means to submit one's self to the ordinance of man. Or better, how we may, as Christians, live in the material reality while maintaining our spiritual apartness.

With today's passage, Peter begins a long series of practical precepts for Christian living.

Whether interpreted allegorically, or pragmatically, what we glean from Peter's writing is that the Christian has a responsibility to God, and to the institutions which God has allowed to be established: in Peter's time, it was to the king or emperor, while in modern application, it is to the state.

We know that, without government, anarchy results, which is counter-productive to the well-being of the citizens. Where there is no law and order, or where people disregard law and order, evil follows in various and sundry forms. This is something that has been obvious throughout history, and we see it in so many ways in our own society. Violence and disregard for others, extends down to even the youngest of children.

Government forms a framework within which individuals can live in harmony with each other. Of course, that is a very simplified way of looking at it. By submitting ourselves to government, in the context of St. Peter's Epistle — that is, living a life of good works and of honest character — we are in a real and moral sense, submitting ourselves to God's will.

At the same time, this submission does not mean to disregard all that we have come to believe and practice as Christians. It does not mean that we endorse evil practices, or leaders with evil intent; indeed, we may even put forth effort in a Christianly manner to bring about reform in the systems of government under which we live.

Today's Gospel, from St. John, in contrast, gives us a glimpse of Jesus preparing the Apostles for something beyond, and greater than, the material world. It is the spiritual world, and it is just as real, though not tangible from the standpoint of our bodily senses.

Jesus tells the Apostles,

*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.*

Of course, these words proved confusing to His disciples. Not unlike us, they were accustomed to the here and now. They, perhaps, failed to notice the subtle difference in the words Jesus used for **SEE**.

In the first reference, *A little while, and ye shall not see me...*, Jesus uses a word that means to see with bodily eyes; while in the second reference, *...a little while and ye shall see me...*, he uses a word for spiritual sight.

This spiritual sight was somewhat difficult for the disciples to comprehend at that time. Indeed, our Lord was with them physically; He was there where he could be seen; He was real; He was tangible.

The time and place of this discourse was the Last Supper, as Jesus prepared His disciples for His coming **Death** and **Resurrection**.

Understandably, it would be sometime later before they would comprehend the full meaning of His words.

In today's world where time is counted not in seconds, but in nanoseconds, it appears that our Christian society is losing its spiritual sight. Spiritual reality is more and more becoming an intellectual concept, giving way to a secular obsession with material self-gratification that is edging its way into the greater Christian world.

We can see quite well with the bodily eyes, but the spiritual sight, if not blinded, is dimming.

**Dr. C. B. Moss** in his book **The Christian Faith** says,

*Each of us is partly spiritual and partly material;  
and each part profoundly affects the other.*

Somehow, we, as a society, have come to rely so much more on our material instincts, rather than on the spiritual, that the balance has become upset.

Our spiritual lives, indeed, our values have become clouded, even to the point of the expectation of a material reward just for *being good*.

It's very easy to paint a negative picture of the state of the Church, or of the state of religion in American life; the difficulty comes in refocusing our attention on the root causes of decline in institutions in our society, especially the Church.

Even within Christian organizations where love, giving, spirituality, born again, and so on, are thrown around indiscriminately, the environment is material, rather than truly spiritual; the appeal is less to our spiritual side than to our material side. There is almost a pantheistic approach to religion. We might be able to say that polytheism is alive and well.

If the Christian community could do but one thing to refocus on the spiritual, that one thing would be to offer God-centered worship.

Truly, the worship of God is not about us, but about Him, our **Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.**

If we are to expound on love, it must come first from the revelation that God is **Love, Perfect Love**, and we were created with the capability to love him, not compelled to love him, but having the ability to choose to love him.

If we want to invoke giving, it must come from the heart. It is, in a sense, an expression of our love for him. What God really wants from us is a dedication of ourselves, our souls and bodies. He wants us to love Him just as He loves us.

If we want to be truly born again, we must show it in our daily lives, demonstrate to the world that we are in Christ, and He is in us; not flaunt it, but let it show forth. We will be known by our good works.

As we gleaned from St. Peter's Epistle, in the context of commitment to the preservation of good order, we may submit to secular authority. We do this by living a life of good works and being of honest character; we then are, in a real and moral sense, submitting ourselves to God's will.

The lessons of today's Epistle and Gospel are a reminder that we are partly spiritual, and partly material. In this materially oriented world in which we live, the balance is more to the material than to the spiritual. We see well with our bodily eyes, but our spiritual sight seems to suffer.

The *Holy Scriptures* and the *Sacraments* of the Church offer us a way to improve our spiritual sight.

The *Holy Spirit* — just as real as anything we can see — can work within us, if we let him, to enlighten us, to open up that spiritual part of us.

The *Holy Scriptures* can bring to light the spiritual reality of our world, both here and hereafter.

Our liturgy is dependent upon spiritual reality; it serves to inspire us as we progress in our spiritual development.

We begin our spiritual journey with baptism, and we continue to develop spiritually as we open our hearts to God and strive to do his will. Though there is much we will not understand until the veil is lifted, and we leave the material behind, there is much that will be revealed to us through the *Sacramental Life* of the Church, through the *Scriptures*, through our *corporate worship* of God.

We are witnesses to the spiritual presence of Christ in His Church which could only be seen after His *Ascension*, and the coming of the *Holy Spirit* on *Pentecost*.

Jesus told His Apostles that their sorrow would be turned into joy, *a joy that no one can take from you*. And that joy has been fulfilled *in the mystic communion of the Church through all the ages with the Spiritual Christ*.

We enjoy that *mystic communion* through the *Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ* which we receive in the consecrated bread and wine, both a material reality and a spiritual reality.

Yes, we are partly material and partly spiritual. And one day we will be loosed from the material bonds of this world, leave the material behind, and joined with all the saints who have gone before us in a heavenly union with our Lord and Saviour, joined together in the eternal worship of God, in the warmth and beauty of His everlasting love.