

## Lent 2 2019

I take as my text today from the Second Lesson from Morning Prayer, the 17<sup>th</sup> verse of the third chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Church at Colossus:

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

Today, I am taking the liberty to turn to the Lessons of Morning Prayer for my text. I would hope, especially during Lent, that each of us is taking time to say at least one of the Daily Offices from the Book of Common Prayer. It is a wonderful spiritual discipline.

The passage from St. Paul appointed for the second lesson at Morning Prayer provides much food for thought. In it, Paul talks about the perfect bond of love and the unity among peoples of different nations and different socio-economic backgrounds, being brought about through this perfect bond of love in Christ.

The thought is reflective of that beautiful passage from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians, where he expounded on Charity as the greatest of Christian virtues, with our understanding of Charity in Paul's context as meaning Love.

Now, this passage to the Colossians must be taken in the context of the universality of the Church — the Church unrestricted, open to all nations, all peoples. We see this more clearly in verses nine through eleven that precede it:

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;  
And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:  
Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.

Before Christ, before the spread of Christianity, the world was divided according to nation, language, culture, socio-economic status. These were the barriers that put people at odds with each other.

These same barriers Christianity broke down and destroyed.

Paul, in writing to the Church at Colossus, is pointing out that God's Grace through Jesus Christ has been extended to all nations, all peoples; that God's "chosen people" included Gentiles as well as Jews; indeed, there was no longer a "favoured nation," because God's Grace was inclusive of all of mankind.

A revolutionary concept in those times; yet, even today, it remains revolutionary, for, indeed, there remain these distinctions, which are necessary to maintain stability and concord between and within nations and groups.

Truly how different the world would be today if everyone embraced the Christian ethic. However, recognizing the need for frameworks to maintain harmony and to promote the welfare of its members, Christianity does not disavow government or the need for responsible leadership as well as contributing members within a peaceable society.

What is significant in what Paul is presenting to the Colossians is the emphasis on personal relationships. That is apparent in the graces that Paul mentions.

There are six: a heart of pity, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and a tolerant and forgiving spirit.

In the ancient world, the world of our Lord, the world of St. Paul, there was little mercy, and no provision for the treatment of the disabled, the elderly, or those suffering from mental illness, even for orphans and widows. Christianity brought about changes as to how people cared for the weak and vulnerable in the world.

The kindness Paul addresses is defined by the Greek word, *chrestotes* (*kh-ray-stot-ace*), which translates into a goodness that is without edges; where a neighbor's good is as dear as one's own good; where there is no harshness.

In Greek, humility also had a suggestion attached to it of servility; but that is not at all how Paul looked at it. For Paul, humility is based on the creatureliness of mankind; that God is the Creator, and we are his creatures. Thus, as children of God, there is no room for arrogance; we are all equal in God's eyes.

Another good Greek word is *praotes* (*prah-ot-ace*). It means gentleness but Aristotle defined it as the mid-point between too much anger and too little anger. For the Christian, it falls under self-control, where there is strength and, for lack of a better word, sweetness.

It is amazing how much we rely on biblical Greek to give us a more precise meaning of a word, such as patience. The Greek is *makrothumia* (*mak-roth-oo-mia*), which Paul uses to describe patience as a reflection of the divine patience, devoid of cynicism or despair.

And then, there is the tolerant and forgiving spirit, bringing to the forefront that we who have been forgiven must also be forgiving, to forebear and to forgive.

But, as Paul continues in this context of Christian unity, he adds one more virtue, which he calls the perfect bond of love.

This perfect bond of love is the binding power, the glue that holds the Christian body together.

Thus, we can see in this vivid picture St. Paul paints for us, the unity in Christ that is the Church, the Body of Christ: a unity that is dependent on this perfect bond of love, reflected in the divine graces that should be embedded in our nature as Christians.

Though there is the invisible Christian unity, there is on the other hand the visible disunity which, if we follow through, in the context of Paul's Letter to the Colossians, should be settled by Jesus Christ. He is the umpire in our disputes, and when we are pulled in different directions, He must be the decider.

But how?

According to St. Paul, everything we do or say should be done in the Name of Jesus. That is to say, we should measure all our actions, our relationships, our words, even our thoughts, on the very presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. What we do, what we say, what we think: can it be done in the Name of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps, our Lenten challenge should be just that: testing our actions, our thoughts, our words in juxtaposition to His Name.

Indeed, our challenge during Lent is to attain to spiritual discipline through physical discipline.

But it is more than that. It is a time to embrace the unity of Christ's Church through the graces of God, in the perfect bond of love reflected in us, individually, as a heart of pity, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and a tolerant and forgiving spirit.

In the early days of the Church, and many years thereafter, when a person was baptized, he took off his old clothes and put on new clothes, white robes, symbolizing that the old self has been left behind, and a new person in Christ had been put on. This action reflects the dramatic change that takes place in a person, in his life, as he begins to grow in grace, and in the knowledge and love of God, reaching toward his full potential as a creature made in God's image.

We can only attain to our full potential in the unity of Christ, where, through the bond of perfect love, we let the peace of Christ rule within our hearts.

That's a big bite to chew on — through the bond of perfect love, let the peace of Christ rule within our hearts.

In a world as we live in today, how do we do that?

The answer is not unlike that given in Paul's time. We are enabled through corporate and private worship and through the Sacraments of the Church, in particular, regularly receiving the Body and Blood of Christ at God's Holy Table.

We are enabled through our participation within the Family in Christ.

Though we may often find peace and tranquility in the beauty of God's Creation, it is in the corporate worship of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier that we find the true Peace of God that passes all understanding — here, now, as we worship God in the beauty of holiness. In our oneness of worship, we are joined to the Oneness of God.