

Lent 4

I take as my text today, the Second Lesson of Morning Prayer, from St. Paul's 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

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.

If you had read the Daily Office of Morning Prayer today, you would have found the seven verses appointed for this Fourth Sunday in Lent to be quite interesting.

In a sense, they shed some light that can tie together the Epistle and Gospel readings appointed for the service of Holy Communion. The theme of the passage from Paul's Epistle to the Galatians revolves around a *vail*.

Here is part of what Paul wrote:

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.

Now, if we search the Five Books of Moses, called the Pentateuch, we find the reference Paul makes to the veil in Chapter 34, verse 33 of Exodus:

And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.

To better understand where Paul is coming from in reference to the veil, one must consider the word *till*. It had originally been mistranslated in the Authorized King James version; the Hebrew should have been translated as *after*.

In light of St. Paul, this makes sense: Moses put the veil over his face *after* he had finished speaking to the people so that they would not see the slow fading of the glory. Not to be disputed, his face shone with such glory when he returned from speaking with God that it was difficult to look upon; but more to the point, that glory faded over time. The veil, then, was to hide the fading glory from the Hebrew people.

What we see in Paul's thinking is that the glory of the Old Covenant was a fading glory, the relationship of the Old Covenant between God and his Chosen People was a fading relationship that would be fulfilled in Christ, fulfilled in a New Covenant sealed in the Blood of the Lamb; not in the lamb of the Old Covenant sacrificial system but in the Blood of Jesus Christ shed on the Cross for all of mankind.

Following through on Paul's line of thought, we may say that there is a veil between God and the Jewish people that hides from them the true meaning of the Scriptures, making it difficult for them to see God.

Whereas, Paul says that, in Christ the veil is lifted, and we can see the glory of the Lord, and, indeed, we are changed from glory to glory in that, as we look upon Christ, we come to reflect Him; as He becomes the focus of our lives, we become more like Him; we come to reflect Him in our lives.

What then becomes evident is that the Law of the Old Covenant has been fulfilled with the Law of Love in the New Covenant.

The *veil* has been lifted so that we may see the fulfillment of the Promise made to Abraham.

Paul gives testimony to that in the Epistle passage for today from his Letter to the Galatians discussing the *bondmaid* and the *freewoman*.

In that passage, Paul cites the two as an allegory: the bondmaid representing the Old Covenant, and the freewoman representing the New; the bondmaid representing the bondage of the Law; the freewoman representing the freedom from bondage by the fulfilling of the Law in Christ Jesus.

Paul's vivid allegorical interpretation of scripture provides an historical narrative that, taken in the literal sense, *half-reveals and half-conceals* a spiritual meaning.

In Paul's interpretation, we have Hagar, the bondmaid, and Sarah, the freewoman, representing, respectively, the Law and the Gospel. We have Sinai and Jerusalem meaning the same thing: law and bondage.

We have Hagar corresponding to the earthly Jerusalem, and Sarah corresponding to the ideal, heavenly Jerusalem, that is, the City of God.

And, we have the Christian believers: they are God's true freemen and heirs of His promise. We can see this because the *vail* for us in Christ has been lifted so that we can see the fading of the old Law and the Glory of the new Law.

If we, then, turn to the Gospel passage where St. John recounts the *Feeding of the Five Thousand*, we Christians, whose *vail* has been lifted, can see this miracle as a precursor of that Heavenly Banquet which we celebrate today: the Breaking of Bread, the Holy Eucharist, or the Holy Communion, or the Mass, however it may be called.

From the hillside by the Sea of Galilee to the Upper Room on the night before His great sacrifice, we are led through the *vail* to see more clearly the fulfilling of the ritual sacrifices of the Old Covenant by the once offered sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, the giving up of His Body and Blood to feed and nourish us spiritually as we also are cleansed and made ready to see His Glory in the Kingdom of Heaven.

What shines through the *vail*, not to be hidden, ever, is God's great love revealed in Jesus Christ. That love has always been there but was not so clearly seen until the advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

While once we were conditioned to obedience to a code of laws, wherein we were unwilling slaves, now we are conditioned to obedience to God by the spirit of Love dwelling within our hearts.

We have gone from the fading glory of the Old Covenant to the triumphant glory of Christ in the New Covenant: a glory that shall never fade.

This revelation of God through Christ awakens within us a desire to submit ourselves to Him and to share the glory and love revealed to us.