

Trinity 24
2021

I take as my text today from the Collect:

***....absolve thy people from their offences; that through thy
bountiful goodness we may be delivered from all the bands of
sins, which by our frailty we have committed....***

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.

As we near the end of the Season of Trinity, the longest season of the Church Year, let us, for a moment, reflect on the Collect for this 24th Sunday after Trinity, the next to the last Sunday of the season, the Sunday before Advent being the last. Reflection is good.

Now, we human beings, at the top of the pyramid of God's Creation, are perhaps the frailest of his creatures. Our frailty lies in what makes us truly different from all other creatures, what sets us apart; that is, our ability to reason, to understand the difference between right and wrong, and to act on emotions, rather than on basic animalistic instinct.

That, our ability to reason, in itself, is a cause for reflection. But, as we look more closely at this Sunday's Collect, we find a certain penitential character, yet a certain hope for what is to come.

While Collects are pretty much taken for granted, many are magnificent not only in language, but also in cutting to the core of our faith.

This particular Collect, traced back to its earliest form, has its origins in both the Leonine and Gregorian Sacramentaries, the two major sources for the 1549 Prayer Book and the two major liturgical forms in use in the British Isles before the Reformation.

We find the Collect to have been part of the Mass held at St. Peter's Basilica at the close of the Christian Year, and it ties together its theme of ***absolution*** with the ***power of the keys*** given to St. Peter.

That Sunday celebration would have occurred just before the Autumn Ember Days, a time of fasting and abstinence in the Western Church. Originally, the Ember Days were associated with the crops, and occurred four times a year, specifically the Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays that follow December 13th, the First Sunday in Lent, Whitsunday, and Holy Cross Day in September.

Of course, we still observe the Ember Days with fasting and abstinence but now they are more closely associated with the ordination of clergy.

Today's Collect is magnificent despite its being relatively short. First, it beseeches God to forgive us our offenses, which, most certainly, over the past year we have committed in the sight of God.

Further, we ask that God do this through his bountiful goodness, a very apt expression, for no better word can describe God's Goodness. It is beyond our human imagination, and the word itself, *bountiful*, conjures up visions of a cornucopia, with its contents spilling over, silos bursting at the seams with the bounty of a fall harvest, and outdoor markets with fruit and vegetable stands overflowing. God's Goodness overflowing, overflowing for us who seek him.

Over the year, through our frailty, we have committed many sins, from which we seek deliverance. Yes, by our very nature, we are frail. And it is this frailty that leads to the corruption of our affections, and to our sinfulness. Indeed, most often we hear these two words used together as our *sinful affections*.

In the terminology of our 1928 Prayer Book, it is not that our nature is corrupt; rather, it is frail. This, in itself, is significant.

For example, if one takes the teachings of St. Augustine at face value, there would be reason to assume that the very nature of mankind is corrupt. While we identify St. Augustine with the concept of *Original Sin*, he went much further, indeed, to the point of saying that human beings are so corrupt that they cannot beget children without sin.

Though severe, St. Augustine gets to the heart of the matter, identifying evil as coming from the misuse of freewill in beings who were originally created good. It was the perverted freedom of the will of the creature that gave evil its birth.

With the advent of the Reformation, a theological austerity became prevalent among the Protestant reformers, taking St. Augustine, perhaps, to the extreme, as in the Five Points of Calvinism, from which a lot of assumptions can be made as to the intentions of God on the one hand, and the corrupt nature of mankind on the other. Either we are destined to salvation, and nothing we do can alter our destiny; or we are doomed to eternal damnation, and nothing we do can change that, either.

Somehow, in the new theology of the Reformers, God's Loving Goodness is suppressed, and the beauty of all his creation de-saturated, stripped of its vibrancy, much as if one were to take a color photograph, and print it in black and white.

Granted, the time was ripe for reform. Many evils had crept into the Church over the centuries since the Apostles. Luther was right in this respect; but, from the narrow approach of many of the reformers, we are left floundering in a paradoxical sea.

Without a doubt, the issue of *Original Sin*, in regard to our frail human nature, has been a focus of much debate, much discussion, and has left a cloud of uncertainty hanging over those who aspire to living a good Christian life, trying to emulate our Lord and Saviour.

In turning to the Collect for today, we find hope; we find hope in the truth of the Gospel and in our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Our hope lies in the treasure that awaits us in heaven, not a reward for *being good*, but, rather, the fruition of our faith in Jesus Christ, and the love that flows from that faith.

Our hope is realized through a living faith. It is cemented in the *Bountiful Goodness* of God, an overabundance of Grace, Love, and Mercy.

We have God's assurance.

Even though, by nature, we are frail, we may have confidence that it is not frailty that is the cause of our sin; rather, that sin is the result of our frailty.

We have assurance as Christians that God will absolve us of our sins through his bountiful Goodness, if we ask him.

We pray privately and corporately. We join together in making our *Humble Confession unto Almighty God* during the Holy Eucharist, and during Morning and Evening Prayer, as we petition for absolution. We must not only petition God through prayer and with our minds, but also with our hearts and our souls; and it must be reflected in our daily lives.

In striving to cope with our human frailty, we have the comfort of the Holy Spirit, we have the Sacraments, and we have each other in the fellowship of Christ's Church — a fellowship that brings us together as Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

We also have confidence in the knowledge that Jesus Christ died on the Cross for all of us, for all of mankind, not just a select few.

Great theologians, such as St. Augustine, have been instrumental, throughout the centuries, in helping us to better understand not only our nature, but also our relationship to God. Often their approaches are quite severe in tone, understandably, as we often need this approach.

But, at the same time, we can find comfort and joy in God's Grace, a gift of Love to us.

In prayer, we ask that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of God's Will for us; we pray for spiritual wisdom; and we pray for understanding of how to apply this wisdom in our lives.

We pray, too, for the power and the strength to conduct our lives according to God's Will as revealed to us.

As we approach the close of this Christian Year, let us reflect on our lives over the course of this year in the inclusive terms of our Christian Duty, and seek God's forgiveness where we have fallen short, and offer him praise and thanksgiving where we have found success.

When we go to God in prayer in expectation of the *now*, as well as the future, let us ask for the strength to overcome our human frailty, and to choose what is right in his sight.

Moreover, let us listen. Prayer is not just a one-way conversation with God. We must take the time to listen as well.

Thus, with the *bountiful goodness* of God, we are blessed, and through his *bountiful goodness*, we may be *delivered from the bands of those sins, which by our frailty we have committed....*

Without him, we are frail; without him, we cannot help but fall. But we pray that we may be kept ever by his help *from all things hurtful, and led to all things profitable to our salvation*. With God, through faith, with his Love and Grace, all things are possible.