

Lent 5
(Passion Sunday)

I take as my text today, from the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel:

He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

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.

In our Lenten journey, we are drawing near to the end, and though we call this Passion Sunday, there is no direct mention in the propers, that is the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel, of the Passion of Christ.

The term Passiontide, denoting the two weeks leading up to the **Crucifixion** of our Lord, was peculiar to the **Anglican Church** until more recent times.

Today, on **Passion Sunday**, the crosses in churches are veiled and statues are either veiled or removed. There are exceptions, many exceptions, such as the Stations of the Cross and crosses that are part of the structure or furnishings of the church.

Indeed, the crosses are veiled to remind us that Jesus hid himself from the Jews in the Temple when they threatened to stone him, as John reported in today's Gospel. Because of his **Divine Nature**, he became invisible to them.

It is appropriate to say that **Passiontide**, perhaps, best expresses this period in the life and ministry of Jesus. This is the time in Jerusalem when his face is clearly focused on the **Cross**.

But his *Fate* was sealed much earlier in his ministry, and the Gospel passage from St. John gives us a little bit of insight into the inevitability of his **Death on the Cross**.

Jesus is in the Temple, and he asks those gathered there who can convict him of sin? There is a moment of silence. Jesus follows up by asking that if he is telling the truth, why do they not believe him?

More silence.

He then makes a statement that does get a response:

He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

In this exchange, Jesus hits a raw nerve. He lays down the gauntlet. He has challenged them to find a charge they can bring against him.

And they do respond. They call Jesus a Samaritan, which is most probably a corruption of translation. It's more likely that what they said was that Jesus was *a child of the devil*. The two words, the one for Samaritan and the one for *child of the devil*, are very similar in Aramaic, and, by that time, the word for Samaritan had become synonymous with heretic as that is how Jews looked upon Samaritans.

As the exchange continues, Jesus tells them that it is not he who has a devil, but they, for they dishonor God.

At this point in the confrontation, Jesus has exposed the Jews to a truth that they could not tolerate. He has told them that, because they don't accept his words, they're not from God, more to the point, the **Spirit of God** is not in their hearts.

At the heart of the confrontation is the Jewish way of thinking about the **Spirit of God**. It is the function of the **Spirit of God** both to reveal God's truth to men, and to enable men to recognize and grasp the truth.

Simply stated, Jesus was telling those gathered that they had become as men who were godlessly serving God.

Because the **Spirit of God** was no longer in their hearts, they could not see the **Truth**, the **Truth** that was right in front of them. They had shut their hearts to the **Spirit of God**, he could not gain entry; therefore, the **Spirit of God** was not within their hearts to enable them to see the **Truth** and incorporate it into their lives. While they may be religious, it was their own manufactured religion, not God's, not as it had been revealed to them. They had gone their own way and closed their hearts to God.

From the Gospel passage, we can see parallels in today's world, right in our own country where the trend, as then, is to redefine and view religion from a humanistic point of view; indeed, to remanufacture religion in the sight of men, not in the sight of God, moral right superseded by societal norms.

There is a false notion that it is coming from the heart; but, in reality, when the precepts of **Christian Living**, handed down from our Lord to the **Church** through his **Apostles** and **Disciples**, are reduced, or altered, to conform to the norms of society, they reflect just what Jesus was trying to illustrate to those gathered in the Temple when he said:

*He that is of God, heareth God's words:
ye therefore hear them not, because ye
are not of God.*

The heart is the key. It is where the **Spirit of God** resides if we open our hearts to him and let him in — then we can see the **Truth**, know, and respond to the **Truth**.

The heart is the seat of love, and God is **Love**.

Meanwhile, in the Temple, the confrontation continues, and the Jews become angrier as Jesus makes one claim after another. He says that if anyone keeps his words, he will never know death.

How so? Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead. Who is this man to set himself above the prophets?

And Jesus further claims to have unique knowledge of God, unique obedience to God.

Then comes the final straw. Jesus says, ***Before Abraham was, I am.***

Not recognizing Jesus as the **Messiah**, they certainly could not, would not tolerate blasphemy, and in their eyes, that is what Jesus had done: he had committed blasphemy by taking on the **Name** of God. At that point Jesus had committed the unthinkable. He had made himself equal with God, this man out of Galilee, this carpenter's son, claiming to be equal with God.

The argument might well have continued if he had said,
Before Abraham was, I was.

So infuriated, they took up stones with which to stone him out of the Temple, if not to stone him to death; but Jesus hid himself and left, being **Divine**, he made himself invisible to them.

For this claim, he would suffer. Jesus was a *marked man*.

Indeed, the *stones* would become *iron nails*, and the *temple* would be a **Cross** on Calvary.

And echoing in our heads are Jesus' words:

He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

Now we have an idea of what he meant.

Open your hearts to the **Spirit of God**; let him in. He will open your eyes to the **Truth**.

Be not mesmerized by society's sanctimonious claims which usurp the revealed **Word of God**. Be not overtaken by secularism.

Do not allow your heart to be drained of the unfathomable **Love of God** by accommodation to the mores of society, rather than **Scriptural** morality.

Just because something is acceptable to the world doesn't mean it is acceptable to God.

The list could go on; but we, as Christians, are called upon to open our hearts to the **Truth**, and to recognize that we are not saved by political correctness alone.

We are not saved by moral accommodation to the whims of society.

We **are** saved by a **Living Faith** in a **Living God**, revealed to us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are saved by the infinite **Love, Grace, and Mercy** of God, if we will just open our hearts and let the **Spirit of God** in.

As more and more Christians around the world are dying for their **Faith**, we Christians, in this country, are dying through *corruption* of our **Faith**, where more and more Christian denominations capitulate to the demands of society, giving in to the latest social trends or fads, compromising the Faith once delivered.

As Christians around us capitulate, we should remain strong and resolute. Our ultimate fate is not determined by man, not by human accord, but by God.

Our calling is through God to God: *He that is of God, heareth God's words....*

In that we are called, let us, then, be resolute and steadfast in the **Truth** revealed to us through Jesus Christ and made manifest in his **Death on the Cross**, and respond by opening our hearts to God and letting him in. As oft as we have heard it said be not changed by the world, then let the **Truth** be affirmed in us and through us, that we may, indeed, change the world — the Christian challenge throughout more than two millennia — be not changed by the world but change the world.