

## Trinity 25

I take as my text today, from St. John's First General Epistle:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..."

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer."

Last week, we looked at the Collect for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, a brief but magnificent prayer that beseeches God in his "bountiful goodness" to forgive us our sins, sins that we have committed through our own frailty.

The implication in the Collect is that God is all-loving and has a storehouse of "goodness." We are the beneficiaries of that "goodness," and from that "goodness" comes forgiveness,

Implicit in that Collect is that our sinning comes about because of the frailty of our nature as human beings. The Collect does not address Original Sin but, rather, our frailty.

However sin came into the world; however we human beings have been infected with or affected by sin; what is important and most certainly implied in last Sunday's Collect is that God loves us; loves us frail creatures.

This whole concept of God's "bountiful goodness" leads us to the Epistle for this Sunday. You have noted that the Propers for the 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday come from the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, an appropriate borrowing within the Church Year, seeing that we have no set Propers for this 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Trinitytide.

Now, if we were to look at all the religions of the world in the light of St. John's Epistle passage we read today, we would, most likely, find one of the following: God maligned, God ignored, God compromised, and God denied.

It is only Christianity that has accepted the revelation of God in his true Nature: the God of Love, Omnipotent and Omniscient, ever-present, a truth that is often obscured by an empirical quest for what is spiritually obvious; obscured by the perception of God as a Punisher, rather than a Saviour.

We were created out of love, and we have been redeemed out of love. Being made in the image of God, we are capable of accepting and sharing that love; we have been endowed with the God-like qualities of reason and feeling, and possess a full range of emotions, love being the pinnacle.

The basis of our creation, of all creation, and of the redemption of all of creation is love.

That is the message John delivers in his Gospel and Letters: the spiritually obvious, the reality of God, and the expression of his relationship to us and to all of his creation.

John reminds us of something even greater than our mere creation: out of love, God has also adopted us as His children, bringing to light our duality as physical and spiritual, bringing us into a special relationship with him.

This adoption is a wonderful privilege extended to those who accept Jesus Christ and respond to God's offering of his Grace.

It is not that we are called the Children of God; but, through baptism, we ARE the Children of God: a privilege we cannot earn; rather, it is a gift of God.

But, at the same time that it is a gift, it is also a privilege that brings with it an obligation: an obligation of purity; an obligation seemingly impossible to keep.

In the context of the relationship between God and His creatures, we can be both what we are by nature, and what we are by Grace.

We can say that by nature, we are creatures of God, and, thus, in a paternal sense, we are His children.

But John is putting forth another aspect of being children, that is, children in the sense of his Fatherhood.

By this, we mean that we are the product of an intimate, loving relationship; a relationship that is extended to us through God's Grace.

This wonderful relationship between God and Man is further illustrated by the two Covenants.

In the Old Covenant, God chose the Hebrew people and established with them a special relationship. He was to be uniquely their God, and they were to be uniquely His People.

To seal that relationship, God gave to the Hebrew people the Law, and it was on the keeping of the Law that that relationship depended. It was the obligation of the Jews to keep the Law, in order to maintain that special relationship with God.

We know through the history of the Jews, through the scriptures of the Old Testament, just how difficult it was to keep the Law, and how often the People of Israel went astray.

In the New Covenant, we see a new idea, a new kind of relationship: adoption.

With the coming of Jesus Christ, the Old Covenant Idea gives way to the idea of Adoption: the relationship based on keeping the Law is replaced with a relationship based on Love.

The legal requirement, so to speak, of the Old Covenant is not done away but fulfilled, in an act of love that brings with it a new perspective, not only of the relationship between God and Man, but also of the obligation to maintain that relationship and the possibilities that go with it.

Our Adoptive relationship with God carries with it the privileges of the Christian life, the fulfilling of our destiny as human beings: that we may, at the last, bear the image and likeness of God; that we may see God; that we may attain to eternal life.

With that privilege, comes the obligation of Purity.

We cannot attain to our destiny as the Adopted Children of God unless we become pure in heart: a tall order, but possible through the working of Jesus Christ in our lives.

It is sin that undermines the process, and impedes progression in meeting that goal.

Sin, as intimated by John, is obeying oneself, rather than obeying God. It is when we deliberately break the laws of which we are well aware.

Sin undoes the work of Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Sin is the result of our failing to keep in remembrance the presence of Christ, that is, when we put Him out of our consciousness.

Sin comes from the Devil, who sins out of principle, and is a power in a world hostile to God.

But, sin has been conquered; its power has been broken by Jesus Christ, Who has broken the power of evil, Who has won the victory over sin, and, through Whom, that victory can be ours.

Here, we find John defending against those who would justify sin. No one, he says, is above the moral law.

As he admonishes us, John is also endearing, referring to us as “little children,” for so we are: little children, in that we have yet to reach a spiritual maturity; little children, in that we are God’s adopted children, reaching to attain our destiny as human beings.

Today, even as in the time when St. John was writing his letters and his Gospel, we are living in a dangerously sinful world. It is a sinful world because evil is working to undermine all that is good, and beautiful, and sacred.

There is so much beauty in God’s Creation that we are blind to the dangers of sin.

We, who want nothing more than to grow in the knowledge and love of God, are constantly challenged by sophisticated philosophical and theological innovations, many of which are not really new but reflect the heresies of the early days of Christianity.

There is an insidious notion that, because we are living in such a rapidly changing world, the Church needs to reflect more closely those changes occurring in society, in effect urging the Church to compromise its moral obligation and Divine directive to change the world, not to be changed by the world.

It is a notion that passively condones sin by allowing aberration as an acceptable spiritual and moral normalcy.

There is no justification for sin. That the spirit is not immune to the desires and actions of the body is clear from the writings of John, and of Paul, in particular, and of all the Church Fathers from the Apostolic Age forward.

As adopted children of God, journeying the road of life, we must stay the course and keep the goal ever before us, that we may pass through the veil into eternal life.

Then, how do we not sin? How do we stay the course? How do we attain to a life of purity? How do we prepare for Christ's return?

The short answer to all of these is: by living our daily lives as living sacrifices, as if they were a prayer offered to God. Whatever we do, whatever we think, should be worthy to be an offering to God. Whatever our talents, abilities, skills; whatever our intelligence and mental acuity; they all come from God, and we should make worthy use of them.

Indeed, we should always acknowledge the presence of God, and the working of Christ in our lives. Jesus Christ should always be in our thoughts, as well as our hearts.

Our every action should be a reflection of the love of God through Jesus Christ. Our purpose in this life should be to imitate our Lord and Saviour, to attain to be like Him to the extent that is humanly possible.

Our Christian Faith is based on love and on God's desire that we should be united with Him in all of eternity. It is for this reason that God sent His Son into the world.

It is exactly what Jesus accomplished: defeating Satan, winning the victory over evil and sin, and making it possible for each of us to finish the race and to gain the prize, to be united with him: that when Christ appears in His Glory at the Second Coming, we shall be like Him, our destiny fulfilled, finally attaining what we had lost, the image and likeness of God in which we were created.