

The Collect.

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O ETERNAL God, through whose mighty power our fathers won their liberties of old; Grant, we beseech thee, that we and all the people of this land may have grace to maintain these liberties in righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Epistle. 1 Pet. 3:8-15

Finally¹, be ye all of one mind², having compassion one of another³, love as brethren⁴, be pitiful⁵, be courteous⁶: not rendering evil for evil⁷, or railing for railing⁸: but contrariwise⁹ blessing;¹⁰ knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*¹¹ And who is he that will harm¹² you, if ye be followers¹³ of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake¹⁴, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.¹⁵

The Gospel. St. Luke 5:1-11

IT came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

What Will They See?

If you were to think of one passage that sets the stage for our basic orientation as Christians in this world, what would it be? I know what mine selection would be: *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*¹⁶ This, of course, is Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount saying to us all: stop being so preoccupied with the things of this world; focus your attention first upon the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and God will take care of everything else.

Now this passage does not refer to how the soul so often becomes entangled with the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” as John says in his first epistle, which results in sin. No, what Jesus is referring to in the Sermon on the Mount is the same thing that he is saying to Peter in our Gospel passage. And this conversation with Peter – between the Lord and Peter - occurs over and over again.

In the middle of Matthew’s Gospel, at Caesarea Philippi, just before Jesus begins his fateful trek to Jerusalem for the final time, we come to a watershed between Peter and Jesus. Christ asks the apostles – all of them – “who do men say that I am.” And, indeed, this is just a precursor to his second question: “who do you think that I am?” And here we are give a confession – that Peter himself makes – that sounds perfectly orthodox on the outside, and yet this exchange ends with one of the most horrific judgements ever to fall from the lips of Jesus against an individual man: *Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

So we have this figure in the New Testament drama that is being constantly thrust into our faces – one who is constantly and loudly proclaiming how much he loves Jesus with his mouth, but one who is constantly denying Jesus by his actions. And I believe that this persona, this typology, if you will, has been placed in the corpus of our Holy literature for a specific reason. Because Peter is representative of the dual nature of the Church. On the one hand, he represents the faith of the Church when he says: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* And also when he says: *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

But on the other hand, he represents (so often) the practice of a Church (down through the centuries) that has (often) functionally denied the blood of the covenant by which we were purchased by God from the slave-market of hell.

The life of Peter is permanently etched into the pages of our literature as the classic failure of faith. He denies the Lord at Caesarea Philippi, he sleeps through the Transfiguration. Now I can understand falling asleep during one of my sermons, but falling asleep during the Transfiguration? And Peter also falls asleep during the agony of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. *Three times.* And even though the Lord has told Peter three times that he must – according to the Scriptures, according to the will of the Father, and according to his own determination – he must be forcefully taken by the Jews

and humiliated by the Gentiles and crucified by the world, and yet when they come to take him by night, Peter draws his sword to *prevent* it. It is like Caesarea Philippi all over again.

And then, of course, there is Peter's catastrophic denial of Christ, three times, as Christ is being arraigned. Let me review this scene with you to make sure that we understand the sense of what the NT authors are trying to convey to us: *Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou were with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou say. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely you also art one of them; for your speech betrays you. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.*¹⁷

And these New Testament authors don't let up. In our Gospel passage we have yet another embarrassing account of Peter's refusal to stop being concerned with the affairs of this world - his fishing business - and flatly ignoring the command of Christ: 'leave everything and follow me and become fishers of men. Feed my sheep. Take no thought for your worldly welfare.' Your Father will take care of all this. You - feed my sheep.

And the story of Peter, is not over, of course. Luke is fairly gracious about recording Peter's continuing failure to obey Jesus Christ. Christ comes to him on the roof-top of Simon the Tanner and says: go to the Gentiles. And Peter says no. No Lord, I will not associate myself with uncircumcised dogs. But eventually, after some divine arm-twisting, Peter (much like Jonah the prophet) does go and he preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and all his house. And yet, as the story goes on in Acts, Peter simply disappears. You'll note that the last mention of Peter in Acts is chapter 15, verse 7. Acts continues for another 13 chapters with no mention of Peter.

There could have been another mention of Peter in Acts, but Luke, always the gentleman, does not include it. We must divine yet another catastrophic failure of Peter's faith from Paul's epistle to the Galatians. We've mentioned this Antiochian affair before. Let's refresh our memories with the facts: *But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.*

And I'll mention just one more catastrophic failure of Peter, that I didn't realize until I did my linguistic analysis of the New Testament. Peter not only drops out of Acts. He drops out of history. And he doesn't re-emerge until almost 35 years later, breaking his silence with his first epistle, which, as I have cautiously and respectfully suggested before, is not a particularly radical epistle. In this epistle he uses Paul's former editor, Silas, follows a template laid down in Titus, sprinkles it with jargon from Paul's epistles and even of Hebrews, and fills it with the theology of James, built around an extended quotation of Psalm 34.

Meanwhile, the Church is struggling for her very life, after the death of Paul. If I were a Church leader then, I would have said: Peter: 'what is this?' It is not until the writing of his second epistle that Peter comes roaring back with a highly radicalized, fully converted faith which does indeed greatly strengthen the world-wide Christian Church.

I would also respectfully suggest that like Peter, Churchmen of today are making highly vocal *political* statements about someone else's political morality but they are entirely silent in making a spiritual statement about their own inner morality.

Perhaps they don't have any. I would suggest. Like Peter, they have taken Christ's mandate to completely renovate the soul and educate the world about the Gospel of Christ, and they have drawn the sword in political jihad to completely renovate the political orientation of the state - with votes and perhaps even guns. This is strictly forbidden in the New Testament.

We could do an entire series on this - the Christian's relationship to the State. My notebook is full of notes in this area that I excluded from this sermon. Because the main point at issue here is our personal relationship to the Lord. And such a study would soon become yet another diversion from facing the fact that the Church's relationship with the living Lord is bankrupt. And I am here making a judgment that St. Paul permits and even encourages. I am making a judgment of the inner life of the Church, not the outer life of the state.

Christ said that the present situation would happen in his final revelation to John. *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.* He is here not talking about political activism. He's not even talking about the Great Commission - to fearlessly proclaim the Christian faith to the lost sheep of Israel within the world. He is here speaking about their personal faith. That's where Peter was. That's where Laodicea was. And I would allege, in my office as prophet - this is where the church is today.

I want to close with an official warning - for the modern confessing church - and for us all. And the warning comes from St. Paul: *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.* And the passage that I have invoked: *For what have I to do to judge them also that are [outside the Church]? Do not ye judge them that are within?* We judge our spouses, we judge our acquaintances. We judge our neighbors. We judge our communities. We judge our institutions. We judge our nation. We judge the world.

But we do not judge ourselves. When it comes to knowing ourselves and judging ourselves and renovating ourselves, we are tepid - at best. Though we are ferociously rabid in our worldly political judgements, we are completely tepid about our own spiritual judgments concerning ourselves. And why is this? We say we can't know for sure. We can't know if the apostles got it right about Jesus. We can't even be sure if Jesus existed.

Oh, we'll never admit this openly. We won't even admit it to ourselves. But even a cursory inspection of our souls will reveal that these tepid, agnostic beliefs are there. And even a cursory review of our behavior will reveal to the watching world that these tepid, agnostic beliefs are there. And you can be sure that the world will be watching and listening to the existential sermons that we preach with our lives and with our mouths every day of our lives. And Jesus will be watching too. And what will they see? Will they see a soul that savors - no - *drools* over the things of other men - or will they see a soul that is constantly searching, constantly yearning, constantly hoping and believing and loving the Kingdom and the righteousness renovation of the soul? - *Amen*

¹ το δε τελος, a phrase used only once in Romans and once in I Timothy.

² ομοφρων (null)

³ συμπαθης another (null) adjective

⁴ φιλαδελφος another null adjective

⁵ A word used only in Ephesians 4:32 (ευσπλαγχνος)

⁶ φιλοφρων courteous, another null adjective

⁷ This phrase is used only once in Romans and 1 Thessalonians

⁸ λοιδορια someone who reviles, monohit with 1 Timothy again

⁹ This word, τουναντιον, is only used once in 2 Cor. and Galatians

¹⁰ This phrase – “render evil” 1Th 5:15 See that none *render evil* for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good

¹¹ Psalm 34:12-16

¹² A word used only by Luke

¹³ μιμητης another Pauline word

¹⁴ Only Peter asks us to suffer for righteousness sake. But why not ask us to suffer for Christ’s sake? – since there is only one righteousness.

¹⁵ Yet what does that mean to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts?

¹⁶ Mt 6:25

¹⁷ Mt 26:69-74