

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hosea 4:6).

My people are destroyed for lack of Knowledge.

What kind of knowledge is referenced in this verse? This is not an absence of understanding, but rather a refusal to incorporate God's law into the heart. Certainly this includes the Mosaic Law given to Israel on Mt. Sinai, but even, more simply, this is the rejection of the first commandment – thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. God had revealed Himself to the descendants of Abraham, He had made a covenant with them – thou shalt be my people, and I will be your God. He had in essence married them, establishing this relationship exclusively with them out of all of the people in the earth. But they turned their back upon Him.

The Hebrews were supposed to be God's representatives in the world, but in rejecting God, they had disqualified themselves from this role. They could no longer be the priest of God to the nations of the world. God rejected them from this role, because they could not represent Him if they despised Him. They were called to be a blessing and to be the people through which redemption would come to all. God in His faithfulness would accomplish this through them—in spite of them. But they themselves would be exiled, would be disinherited, would be disciplined, in order to bring them back.

Now it is critical to understand that the precepts, principles, and laws that God has given to humanity, to us, are not just arbitrary rules. God didn't simply make up a certain number of regulations, disconnected from the world or from Himself. The Law of God is a reflection of the character of God. Creation and the incomprehensible order embedded within it are an extension of God's divine nature.

Having this in mind helps us to clarify the last sentence of Hosea 4:6, “seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” When the Hebrews turned their back upon the Law of God, they were in fact rejecting the essence of God's being. Embedded within the Law is the image of God revealed for us. Our children, similarly, image ourselves. A rejection of the first leads to a rejection of the second. If we turn our backs upon the principles of God which flow from His being, then He will no longer bless the extension of our being, which is our children.

Understand that this isn't a “tit-for-tat” response. God is patient and kind; He is long-

long-suffering, and He is not impetuous. Hosea 4:6 is a call to the people to repent. God did not suddenly or surreptitiously cut off His people, but He gave many warnings through the prophets so that the people would turn back from their rejection of knowledge, from their rejection of God. To make this more concrete, Hosea was written around the time of the fall of the Northern Tribes of Israel; there is a sense in which these tribes could have still been saved from conquest and exile if they would have turned back to God. It is also written as a warning for the Southern Tribe of Judah so that they would continue to pursue the knowledge of God as well, or they too would eventually suffer the same fate as the Northern Tribes.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

This brings us to the Gospel lesson for today. For context, Israel fell to the Assyrians around 722 BC., and Judah was finally completely exiled by the Babylonians around 586 BC. In God's mercy, these exiled Jews were eventually restored to the promised land and would continue in that land until after the time of Christ. However, the New Testament shows us that the Jews of Christ's day were little different from their ancestors, for as Jesus approached Jerusalem at the beginning of Passion Week, he wept over it and proclaimed with a sorrowful voice:

If thou hadst *known*, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou *knewest* not the time of thy visitation [emphasis added].

So even here we see the Jews, the covenant people of God, blinded to the things of God. They are destroyed for lack of knowledge. They had distorted the meaning of the scriptures so that they did not recognize the coming of their messiah. Of course, not all were blind to their messiah, for He had touched many people. He had healed many people. They might not have been the religious experts, but they knew that Jesus made the lame to walk and the blind to see. At the entry of Jesus into the city, the common people proclaimed, "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." But even these people were later turned by the blind leaders of Israel leading their blind followers and they would indeed both fall into the pit. In a few days, the hosannas would be replaced by, "Crucify Him!"

And Christ's sorrow for this city, the city in which was the Temple of God, God's very presence with His people, was justified, for Jerusalem would be compassed about by the Roman armies beginning in 66 AD. And indeed by the end of that barbaric siege in 70, not one stone was left upon another of that city. If thou hadst *known*, O Jerusalem, the things which belong to thy peace!

But alas - My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

But not all the people had rejected the knowledge of God. The followers of Christ had been forewarned that they should flee the city when they saw the armies gathering. Granted, our records are certainly not comprehensive, but we do not have historical indication of any Christians being caught up in the siege. The Christians had fled because of their knowledge and were largely spared from that judgement.

We are blessed today because we have the gift of historical perspective and the gift of the compiled written revelation of God – the Bible. It contains all that we need for salvation. More than that, it contains all that we need for life. And yet let us not think that it is just me and my Bible, and we can figure it all out. Unfortunately this is the mode of operation for many who claim the title of Christian. Christianity is not a lone-ranger religion. We work out our faith within the context of the Body of Christ, the Church; and according to the epistle lesson today, the Church is also the critical gift which allows us to know God as revealed in Christ. It is within the context of the Church that our knowledge of God is perfected over time.

Once again, let us be reminded that this isn't merely a head knowledge of God. The knowledge of God which we seek is relational. We know God because we have a relationship with Him, and we are continuously learning to love Him, and learning to love the world as He does.

St. Paul this morning in the epistle lesson from 1st Corinthians 12 begins by saying, "Concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed." Notice the words Paul uses here. "I would not have you *ignorant*." You know that you were *dumb* even as the idols which you used to worship were dumb. "Wherefore I give you to *understand*."

In the Church, our ignorance is reversed. In the Church, we have the knowledge that we need for life. In the Church, Christ is revealed to us. How does St. Paul describe this?

First let us acknowledge what he doesn't say. He doesn't say that each of us, because we are in the Church, have an immediate knowledge. We aren't individually given all the understanding we need so that we function autonomously. The Church isn't a computer network, into which once we are plugged in, we have all of the information at our fingertips browsing along detached from interactions with others.

No, the analogy that we are given is that the Church is a body. Our reading this morning stopped at verse 11, but the very next verses continue as follows:

12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

The point here is that all of the parts of the body are needed and provide a special function, a special gift, that is vital to the well-being of the whole. Some of us are bones and muscle that help the parish to move about and interact with the world. Some of us are internal organs that feed us through service behind the scenes. Some of us are thinkers and help to process ideas and information and provide theological insight to the whole. All of us are needed for the health of the body, and we are impaired when we lose the participation of our members through whatever means that might be, whether moving away or lack of conviction in participation or even through death. The point here is that you, each and every one of you, are needed. And your presence in this parish is a gift to everyone else here.

Of course St. Paul in the epistle, is focused not only upon administrative gifts – as I describes them above, but also upon the spiritual giftings that each of us has.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of *knowledge* by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues [emphasis added].

Now among all of the teachers in today's Church as a whole there are cessationists who believe that the more charismatic gifts such as tongues and healing and the working of miracles are no longer in operation at all. Then we have our charismatic brethren who tend to

focus more exclusively upon the manifestation of such gifts whether or not they are genuine. I tend to be of a skeptical stripe, but always open to where God would lead and to what God would do in any given moment. St. Paul strongly implies that such gifts are normative in the Church, so who am I to contradict him? Unfortunately, charismatic churches have a strong emphasis upon emotional, and I might say, performative manifestations. I believe that this can be dangerous; there can be an impulse, and expectation, to *make* things happen.

But our faith is not based upon emotions or miraculous healings or demonstrations. Our faith is based upon the Word of God, and the real charismatic miracle is simply the gift of life given us in the Spirit. This includes not only our living and moving and being, but also our new birth into the body of Christ through baptism. This is the true miracle, that God saved us who did not deserve His salvation. While we are open to whatever super-natural gifts God might give, rather let us continually be astounded, amazed, enraptured, by that miracle of new life.

Finally, it is important to note that all gifts are given for the edification of the whole body. They are not given to bring attention or glory to the individual. The exercise of all gifts strengthen the whole and increase the unity in the Body.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. [the NKJV and others read “for the profit of all”] ...
but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

It is through the gifts given to us individually and placed in service of the whole that we would have the knowledge of God to remain faithful in this world. To the unfaithful Israelites of the Old Testament God said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” May God grant that such would never be said of this parish. But by the Spirit of God indwelling his faithful people and giving a multitude of gifts to them, may we, the people of God, be preserved through the knowledge given us by the Spirit. More than this, let us devotedly pray that we would prosper as God wills, and that we would grow the Kingdom of God in this world until the fulness of the elect are brought in.

It is the One Spirit of God that works and coordinates all of this together. We are One Body, and we are members of each other for we are members of Christ, we have been grafted into Him. And now as a sign of our unity, and for a continued strengthening so that we might be

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encouraged to more devoted service to each other through our gifts in Christ, let us prepare to receive the sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus. His One Body, broken and given for us, binds us mystically together into the unity of the whole.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.