

We began our readings this morning with Psalm 19. It is a truly magnificent poem of praise to God beginning with praising God for the majesty of Creation.

THE heavens declare the glory of God; \* and the firmament showeth his handy-work.

2 One day telleth another; \* and one night certifieth another.

3 There is neither speech nor language; \* but their voices are heard among them.

4 Their sound is gone out into all lands; \* and their words into the ends of the world.

But the Psalmist soon pivots from a meditation upon the beauty and majesty of creation to meditate upon the beauty and majesty of the Law of the Creator which is the expression of God's supremely pure character. The Law flows from the being of God. It is the image for us of the beauty of the goodness of God.

7 The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul; \* the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple.

8 The statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart; \* the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever; \* the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; \* sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover, by them is thy servant taught; \* and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Likewise, Psalm 24 begins with the physical world and then pivots to the contemplation of the Spiritual world.

THE earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is; \* the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein.

2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, \* and stablished it upon the floods.

In these two verses, we acknowledge that the incredible bounty of the world belongs to the Creator of the world. But the implication in these verses is that this bounty is bestowed upon us. We are stewards of what ultimately belongs to God. How are we to receive this bounty? With gratitude leading us to praise and worship, and that worship of God inspires us to godliness and pure living.

3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? \* or who shall rise up in his holy place?

4 Even he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; \* and that hath not lift up his mind unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbour.

5 He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, \* and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

And our righteous lives are not an end to themselves, for they turn us to hope. We know that God shall return to His people, yes, in their praises, but also will finally be present with His people in the fullest sense. This is our perpetual hope that shall not be disappointed.

7 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; \* and the King of glory shall come in.

8 Who is this King of glory? \* It is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle.

9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; \* and the King of glory shall come in.

10 Who is this King of glory? \* Even the Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

The heavens declare the glory of God. The earth is the Lord's and all that therein is. God is good, and we obviously see this in the magnificent world in which He has placed us, with which He has blessed us. According to these psalms, our appropriate response to God, as revealed both in nature and in His righteous laws, is to fall down before Him and worship Him with hearts full of thanksgiving. Worship connects us to the God of Creation. Worship leads us to righteousness.

Although this is our appropriate response, due to our essential self-centeredness we unfortunately do not do as we ought. Instead we follow our own inclinations; we exalt ourselves over God by setting His law off to the side. Maybe we aren't blatantly evil – we aren't committing genocide. But we do consciously decide to not serve that person who needs help. Or we don't really wish to get up for church or morning prayer, or we don't tithe as we should, or ... the list goes on and on.

The struggle that we face every moment of our lives is not a new one. It is endemic to humanity. From the Old Testament reading today, Michah 6:1-9, we see that God's old covenant chosen people, the Jews, struggled with the same battle. God says to them, "O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." God had redeemed Israel, and yet Israel did not follow God with their hearts. God didn't want more sacrifices. God wanted hearts that

would love Him, that would prioritize Him above all else, for only through love could true obedience be performed.

With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

The questions asked by the prophet here are of course rhetorical. The implied answer to them is that no number of sacrifices, no giving of another life, animal or human, would suffice to make atonement for one's own soul. The prophet continues:

He has shown thee, O man, what *is* good;  
And what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justly,  
To love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

Just like in the psalms this morning, this simple yet deeply profound verse asserts that we already *know* what is good. We see it in Creation, we reason it in our minds, we perceive the goodness and righteousness of God that He has set within our hearts. And yet, without Christ, this law is foreign to us. We may want righteousness, but we want to satisfy our own desires more than we want to satisfy God's desires for us. We know what we ought to do, but we do not do it. We are to do justly – giving to each man his good due. We are to love mercy – withholding as appropriate from each man his penal due. And we are to humble ourselves before God, knowing that He is the one to whom all our devotion is owed.

We know what we ought to do, but we do not do it. St. Paul exposes this internal conflict, in the reading from Galatians today, between what he identifies as the flesh and the Spirit. As Christians, we have the Spirit of God given to us in baptism, and it is God's Spirit which renews our fallen natures, enlivening again the nascent spirit of the divine which our sin had previously killed. And this Spirit of God also equips us for this moral struggle, this war which rages in our hearts whenever we are faced with a choice of doing rightly versus behaving selfishly. As noted before, we all generally understand good and bad behavior. It is revealed to us in nature and in the law of God written on our hearts. But just to be obvious about it, Paul recounts a list of vices and virtues for us.

This list is deserving of its own study, but for now, note that the vices – the sinful, selfish behaviors, tends to focus on immediate fulfillment and pleasure – doing what feels good now. The virtues, what St. Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit, require us to not respond with the first emotion that we may feel, given any particular situation. They require us to step away for a moment to evaluate that with which we are faced in order to understand what is appropriate and then to resolve to do what is appropriate. This often requires us to wait patiently or to give lovingly. The fruits of the Spirit do not come to us effortlessly. They are disciplines which must be cultivated over a lifetime, and thus they are very fittingly named, “fruits” of the Spirit.

St. Paul tells us to walk in the Spirit, and we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. What does this mean? It means that we must nurture our connection with the Spirit of God constantly so that we would desire most of all to please God. We put aside what we naturally and immediately want and endure what God allows in our lives with patience. We pray. We focus upon what God has done for us, and not upon what we feel that we deserve. We give of our time, talent, and treasure because we are part of a community. We are part of the building of that community. This is a very intentional approach to life – we see what is good, and then in our love of God, we seek to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. The epistle reading concludes with, “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” In other words, we daily put to death our own selfish desires and wants, and we, in a very purposeful way, pursue Christ. The Christian determines in his life, to keep Christ at the center of his thoughts, affections, and actions.

This brings us to the Gospel lesson. We read that ten lepers were sent by Christ to the priest so that they could be certified as having been cleansed from their leprosy. Did all ten have faith? Yes, all ten went when instructed by Jesus. They acted upon the command of God, and the gospel says that, as they went, they were cleansed of the leprosy. They had faith and were healed. But one of them, a Samaritan, one who was outside of the covenant that God had made with Israel, felt a great sense of gratitude well up in his heart. Perhaps this was a case of the outcast of the outcasts having the keenest sense of his personal unworthiness. He was the one who felt his failings and his rejection by all most deeply, and therefore to be healed, to be raised up from a type of death to life once again, was a double blessing for him. Sensing

this, He had to turn back to return thanks to God. He was shown great love, and he loved greatly in return.

Have you ever been the recipient of a great kindness? Something that you could not repay? Perhaps there has been something really great, aside from salvation itself, that you were blessed with in this world, something another person did for you. In being the recipient of such a gift, one is liberated, one is freed, and that freedom is only repaid by becoming a better person. Such a gift is transformational for it touches our hearts. It makes us love all - all people, all creatures, all beauty, all goodness – more than we previously did. The leper knew that he had received such a gift from Jesus. He had to return to try to express how deeply, how profoundly, this gift had touched him. “And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.”

That day, he was no longer just a Samaritan – a half Jew and therefore doubly despised. That day, he became a worshipper of Christ, a follower of Christ. That day, the law of the flesh was replaced by the love of Christ. He was no longer a Samaritan. That day he began to live in the Spirit following the path of faith in Christ.

We know that we are to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Yet our hearts are often not desirous of pursuing such things. Our flesh wars with the Spirit of God within us. How then do we walk in the Spirit instead of fulfilling the desires of the flesh?

Perhaps we should take our cue from the Samaritan.

It is easy to look around at the world to see how disordered it all is. Things are a mess. And yet we who have been baptized into Christ, have been saved from that mess. Don't get me wrong—life is still really hard, but our spirits have been renewed with the Spirit of God. The world is a mess, but we are made alive in Christ, and our affections have been and are being reordered. We have been saved. Does that mean something to you? As Christians we know that God is in control even though the world is falling apart. All of this will work itself out for the building up of the kingdom of God. We must perpetually exercise our spiritual

imagination to be constantly reminded of all of the blessings that we have in Christ. We too must turn around, we must repent, running back to Christ, falling upon our knees and proclaiming with a loud voice, "Thank you, Jesus, for saving me, for giving me life. And I now lay down my life for you because you have given your life for me. I do not have all the answers, but you do, and I will trust in you."

Do you wish to walk in the Spirit? Then learn to love Christ, for we become what we love. Nurture gratitude toward Christ by meditating upon the blessings, the new life, that we have received from Him. That gratitude then leads to worship so prioritize worship which teaches us to love more deeply.

Jesus, may we never wander far from you. May we be quick to always turn back to you in gratitude and repentance. Make us whole. Give us faith. Multiply our hope.

Let us pray.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.