

In today's collect, one clause in particular stands out, and that clause is, "Because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall." It has a Tolkeinesque sense to it – the world of men is falling because of the frailty of man. Thus ... hobbits right?

As good Christians people, when we read this clause, we most immediately think about all of those non-Christian people whose lives are full of chaos and disorder because they do not trust Jesus; they are outside of the people of God. Certainly we would agree that to deny God and to deny that He created the heavens and the earth is a recipe for chaos and brutality. Without God, morality collapses and ethics devolves into might makes right. The powerful prey upon the weak, consolidating their rule until someone more powerful ascends to the head of the tribe.

Yet in reading our lessons today, we should not summarily push this clause on to non-Christians so that we can quickly be done with it and move to the next chapter. No, we should rather allow these lessons to be lenses through which we examine our own lives. As those who should know better, having come to faith in Christ and been baptized into the Church, how well do our lives reveal a true and lively faith in Christ? As Christians, how often do we conduct our lives without attending to God?

Let us take a closer look at the epistle lesson from the end of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. To review, the overall concern of this letter is that some individuals within the Galatian church were teaching that Gentile converts to Christ had to submit to circumcision, which is the sign of the Mosaic covenant. In essence, this means that converts would have to become Jewish in order to become fully Christian. St. Paul argues that the Christian man who takes on the sign of the Old Covenant, would be taking onto himself the entirety of the Old Covenant, would be living by it and seeking salvation through it. Yet it was neither possible to faithfully keep The Old Covenant nor be saved through it. The man who is Circumcized does not earn any merit or favor with God.

Evidently, the false teachers who were promoting circumcision did it for a couple of reasons. First, since Judaism was a recognized monotheistic religion within the Roman empire, the Jews received more tolerable treatment than this new-fangled religion called “The Way” with adherents called Christians so it was a means of moderating persecution. Secondly, taking on circumcision was a means whereby someone could claim a superior spirituality. They were the serious Christians. Those who advocated this practice won to themselves more accolades if they could convince others to follow their example. St. Paul says that these false teachers, “Glory in your flesh.”

Circumcision then, in this New Testament context, was a means of works based righteousness. It especially appealed to the pride of those who taught and promoted this practice. It was a means in which one could gain the trappings of holiness and devotion, but its focus in upon man, not upon God. Here we have Christians who are not humbling themselves before Christ, but rather are exalting themselves above Christ, making a pretense of holiness to mask their pride.

The Apostle profoundly and powerfully writes, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” The glory is not for us. It must all be for Our Crucified and Risen Savior Christ. In time we will have glory, but such glory will be given by God to those who persevere; it cannot be seized for oneself.

Here, according to St. Paul, circumcision has no spiritual benefit. What matters is the cross of Christ. His cross is our own crucifixions for in it, we die to the fallen world. Not written here, but implied, is that in Christ’s Resurrection, we are raised to new lives. We are new creatures in Christ, and this is what is important. The Old Covenant is done away with because it has been fulfilled by Jesus, and since we are in Jesus by faith, then He has fulfilled

that Law for us. Thus to attempt to fulfill the Law on our own is to, in effect, deny the benefit of Christ and to treat His cross with contempt. Good luck with keeping the law without Christ. The frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall.

Now let us consider the lesson from the Gospel of St. Matthew, where is recorded for us Christ's Sermon on the Mount. In the epistle, we saw mankind vainly striving on his own to bring about a righteousness outside of God's provision, to have a renewed life apart from God. In this effort, he, in fact, actually alienates himself from renewed life in Christ. Now, in the gospel lesson, we again see the vain striving of mankind to provide for his material needs apart from God. We worry about our food, clothing, and shelter; we behave as if we are the ultimate source of these things, ignoring the goodness of God and His loving care for us, disregarding that our, "heavenly Father knoweth that (we) have need of all these things."

Now of course on reading this passage from St. Matthew, we immediately go to two extremes. First, this doesn't mean that we can be lazy, deciding not to work and taking advantage of others to meet our needs. Therefore, let us be diligent to perform the duties we are given.

Second, it also doesn't mean that God will provide us with constant comfort. He gives us what we need, not necessarily what we want. Sometimes being in want is, in fact, what we need. If our need is indeed to learn dependence upon Christ, to learn that Christ is our bread, our clothing, and our shelter, then may we welcome necessity in this world!

Too many of us, who are called by the Name of Christ, who ought to know better, still live in a world governed by scarcity, by death. We are afraid, and therefore we strive and struggle and plan and scrimp. Maybe we live in fear in other areas as well? Maybe with our friendships, we give to others only enough so that it doesn't cost us too much emotional capital. We give to one another only enough that it doesn't really cost us, or put us in a risky

place. "O ye of little faith!"

Don't we realize that it is God who meets our needs, not only our physical needs, but our social needs as well? We can give of ourselves to others without fear. We can have abundant and generous hearts for we are not striving on our own. We are not without God! He will keep us ever from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation.

Both of this morning's lessons end with sayings that we should not gloss over. In the gospel we read, "But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." If our priority is upon our own needs, then we are living in that world of scarcity and fear. We are those frail ones, living without God, destined to fall. Notice that in the verse, we are to prioritize two things. The second one listed is the righteousness of God – that is we as individuals should indeed be praying and studying God's Word, and doing all those good things we ought to do for our soul's health and to grow in Christlikeness.

However, the first priority mentioned is that we should be seeking is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, what does this mean other than the Church? Now many Christians do not have a definite idea of what this means. For them, the Church is a nebulous, invisible thing. Some people are in, some are out, we don't really know. For them, seeking the Kingdom of God means evangelism, trying to get more people in. Now this isn't wrong, but perhaps it is an incomplete understanding.

As catholic Christians, we assert that the Church isn't invisible and nebulous, but it is very visible and tangible, having a local expression as the parish. Look around you at your brothers and sisters here gathered to worship God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is the local representation of the Kingdom of God, and it deserves to be prioritized in your life. You have a ministry here. Do you know what it is? Can you say, "My ministry to my parish, Christ the King Anglican Church is (fill in the blank)?" Do you understand that worshipping

here isn't about you? It is first about Jesus, but that means it is about us because we collectively are the Bride of Jesus, we are the Body that has Jesus as it's Head, we are the living stones that comprise the temple of God with Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.

May I suggest that if you are struggling to trust God to provide, that if you are feeling like you just need to work harder or scrimp and save more, that you are the one to whom this passage is addressed. If there is anxiety at your core instead of peace, if you feel like you need to do this or that so that there is just minimal time for the church, or that you give to this mission group and to that one and you do something else over there, that your life may be dis-integrated. O ye of little faith. Trust God. Seek first the Kingdom of God. Give of yourself out of the abundance with which Christ has given you. Prioritize this family here, for whom Christ died.

Switching once more back to our epistle, the other verse that we shouldn't skip over is, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." What is meant by "a new creature?" Given the context of Galatians, St. Paul is pleading with us to leave the old paradigm behind. You are not earning merit with God by your works. God doesn't need us in any sense, but even so, you are the object of God's love. It is He that has brought you into His family. The grace of Christ has been poured out upon you, making you new, giving you new life. Stop striving to earn God's favor, stop trying to be good enough through your own will power. The frailty of man without God cannot but Fall.

In Christ, you are already good enough. In Christ, you are a new creature. Progressing in spiritual maturity is not about your greater effort or will power. It isn't about more rules or the mark of the Mosaic Law. It is about what you love. Focus on loving Christ more, which inevitably means loving yourself less. That's it. Your love for Jesus will bring you into a greater conformity to His will; will bring you into holiness. Your love for Jesus will bring you

into and through the trials of life, which undoubtedly will leave their marks upon you. You will say with The Apostle, “I bear in my body,” not the mark of the Old Covenant, but “the marks of the Lord Jesus,” and be assured that those marks will have their eternal reward.

Truth indeed it is, that The Frailty of Man without God cannot but fall. Let us therefore do nothing without God. Let us not seek our own righteousness; let us not seek our own glory. Let us not fret and worry about the dearth or plenty that tomorrow brings; let us not resent the trials and blessings God providentially gives. Rather, let us pray to God that He be with us always and everywhere, that everything we do, until our lives’ ends, would be done in Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, and to the eternal Glory of God. Amen.