

Last week we discussed the sin of pride – the sin that exalts ourselves above God. It is reasonable, without any other information, that we should be focused upon ourselves and neglect God. That is, without any other information. But we do have other information. We have the revelation of God given us through the world around us. We call this General Revelation, for everyone has access to the world in which we exist. Besides this, we also have the inspired scriptures which reveal God to us more explicitly. We call this Special Revelation. The revelation of God to us through these two sources leave us without excuse. We are expected to worship the One from whom all being flows, the One who made all things, visible and invisible. Worshiping ourselves instead of God is therefore the sin of pride. As we mentioned last week, pride is a sin of the mind. It begins with our thoughts, especially with our refusal to give God His due.

This week we look at the sins next door to pride. They are the sins of vainglory and envy. Pride exalts itself over God, while vainglory and envy exalt the self over others. Vainglory seeks out praise for ourselves. The most gratuitous form of this is prompting others for compliments. We recognize this as immature, but don't worry, as we grow older we learn how to do this in more sophisticated ways. We become very good at hiding our real motives in our interactions with others to the point where we ourselves may not recognize why we say certain things or act certain ways. Vainglory seeks recognition from others, though not necessarily a specific thing from a specific person. Vainglory, for example, might assert itself into leadership positions because it cannot tolerate being second to others.

Envy, though similar to vainglory, focuses more on a specific honor and a specific person. It is desirous of the praise or recognition or status that another receives. Someone else gets the promotion so we have to soothe our feelings by claiming that they really didn't deserve it as much as we did. Someone else wins an industry award or wins the girl or does well in a class. Instead of being happy for them and being inspired to do better, we blame it on favoritism or systemic oppression. When we have a difficult time acknowledging that others are better than we are, this is Envy. It differs from petty jealousy or covetousness in that these latter sins are focused upon things, not upon people. Vainglory and envy are similar in that they are both sins of the mind, sins of our private thoughts, and they both exalt the self over others.

Our gospel lesson today is a condemnation of vainglory and envy. "Judge not lest ye be judged." On reading this, we must ask ourselves the questions, "Do we really know whether or not that other person deserves the praise or recognition that he was given? Do we understand the motives behind his actions? Do we know how hard he worked or the sacrifices he made to accomplish what he did?" The answers are, "No, no, and no." All human judgment

is faulty to some extent. We do not even know our own hearts or our minds. God is the only perfect judge, and only Christ is worthy to judge us. We are not worthy to judge each other so we must refuse to be judgmental.

In our world, I most commonly see this when people presume to judge motives. For example, we hear many people condemned as “racist” today. As mere humans, we cannot look into the hearts of others and know if they bear a specific hatred of a particular race or not. We may be able to judge actions, but we cannot see into the heart and know the motives behind any given actions. Do you want God to look upon you with His grace and favor? Then you must look upon each other with grace and favor. Do not interpret the actions of other people in a negative way. Always seek to find the good in others. Be gracious to each other.

Are you critical of others? Upon what basis do you criticize? Is this merely a means of gaining praise and control for yourself? If we are going to be critical of someone else, then we must take some time to examine our motives and to seek out the deep thoughts of our own hearts. We must cast the plank out of our own eye before presuming to pick the speck out of the eye of another person. Such self-examination is extremely challenging because we always seek to justify ourselves; we are unable to accurately see the selfishness and pride at our core.

Are you being criticized by someone else? Do not bristle at what may be unfair criticism, but rather humble yourself and consider what has been said. There will be some truth in the criticism even if it is given in a mean or condescending manner. It is extremely hard to receive such input from others, but we should not let our wounded pride blind us from the opportunity to grow in Christlikeness. We typically do not navigate these waters very successfully. We all have a self-conception which says, “I’m really a decent fellow when it comes down to it.” It requires serious work to dislodge the pride, and likewise the vainglory and envy, in our hearts.

Once again stepping back to last week, we can see that Pride exercised against God’s rule over us may not have such a direct impact on other people. God is not hurt when we angrily shake our fists at Him or when we casually ignore Him. He simply desires to pour love out upon His people, whether they are open to receive it or not. Vainglory and Envy, on the other hand, can be manipulative and even dangerous. Think of Potiphar’s wife lying about Joseph when he refused her advances. He was imprisoned due to her false accusation. We have heard many false accusation stories like this in our own time. We also think about Haman trying to destroy the Jewish people because of his envy of Mordecai. Thankfully God saved His people through the obedient and courageous Queen Esther. One could also make the case that the immediate cause for the crucifixion of Jesus was the envy of the Jewish religious

leaders. People may be hurt when we act upon our desire for glory, or seek revenge on others whom we feel do not merit the accolades given to them.

But let us also remember that none of the schemes wielded against the people of God end up destroying them. God works all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. What man intends for evil, God uses for good. Might the schemes of the wicked bring about suffering for God's people? Undoubtedly. We will suffer because of maliciousness resulting from envy and the prideful hatred of God. And yet God will use our patient bearing-up under unjust suffering to glorify His Kingship and to grow His Kingdom.

This appeals directly to the epistle lesson this morning which begins, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." As followers of Christ, we will suffer in this world. Our gut instinct is to put ourselves forward, to do what we can to avoid suffering, to grasp for whatever relief may be readily at hand or to assert ourselves before others, even if it means causing great distress elsewhere.

Vainglory is a fitting name for the sin that we are discussing today because instead of waiting on God, we grasp for glory for ourselves, and this all ends up in turmoil and vanity. What we should be doing, as children of God, as followers of Christ, is enduring what trials come our way while waiting patiently for the consummation of the redemption to come. Creation waits patiently for the redemption that shall appear in us. We should follow its example as we also wait for God to justify us, instead of striving against each other to justify ourselves.

Not only do we see the emphasis on patience in the epistle lesson, but we also read about it this morning in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, chapter 3.

Through the LORD's mercies, we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.

They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I hope in Him!"

The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,
To the soul who seeks Him.
It is good that one should hope and wait quietly
For the salvation of the LORD.

And the psalm today reflect similar themes of trusting in God. It begins:

Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most
High, shall abide under the shadow of the Al-
mighty.

I will say unto the Lord, Thou art my hope, and my
stronghold; my God, in him will I trust.

For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the
hunter, and from the noisome pestilence.

He shall defend thee under his wings, and thou shalt
be safe under his feathers; his faithfulness and truth shall
be thy shield and buckler.

The contrast established here is between, on the one hand, our rushing to defend ourselves against all attacks that come, striving to exalt ourselves above others, and on the other hand resting in the identity that we have in Christ and in the protection of God. Really this comes down to a matter of trust. Do we believe that God is who He says He is? Do we believe that He is faithful to His people? Will we be content to dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, under the defense of His wings? The answer to these questions depends nothing on our feelings. It depends upon the faith given to us by God. We are called to patient abiding, to waiting upon God to protect or justify us. We are not burdened with the defense of our own honor or the indignation at being passed over for that promotion or job. The solution to the sins of Vainglory and Envy is that we wait upon God for He is just and all things will be repaid. The sufferings we endure for Christ's sake in this world, will bring glory to us in the next. The evil committed in this world will be repaid in the next. We are to lovingly obey God in our waiting and to do those good works that we are called upon to do. We must leave the results to Him.

Like pride, Vainglory and Envy are sins of the mind or intellect. The virtue that battles these sins is prudence. The first definition that we find for prudence is "the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason." Sins of the mind are thus combated by virtues of the mind. As Christians, we must therefore put on the mind of Our Lord. If we have fallen ideas, then we will sin. If our minds have been redeemed, and thus transformed by the Spirit of God who dwells in us, then we will know the Truth. Thinking correctly with the mind of Christ is a prerequisite to combating envy, vainglory, and pride.

Specifically this morning we are encouraged to meditate with faith upon the justice of God and the faithfulness of God. He will make all things right, particularly in the next world, but also in this world so that each one is given his due reward as God arranges the affairs of man.

We do not need to exalt ourselves over others. We do not need to push ourselves to the front of the queue. Rather, we need to rest patiently in God. We need to learn to defer to others. These are conscious decisions that begin in our thought life, and then work themselves out in our actions and conduct towards others. Let us not seek from the world what it cannot provide. Instead, let us live as the redeemed people of God, waiting patiently as God brings the nations into His fold. Submit to God's goodness, abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Turn your eyes from your neighbor and let them gaze into the face of Christ, and especially as we now turn to the sacrament, given to us in divine love, of His Body and Blood.

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