

We continue today with our series on spiritual growth for this is the Trinity season. We are using the lens of the seven deadly sins and considering each, in turn, in the three fold cycle of purgation, illumination, and finally union. Today we revisit the sin of wrath. Previously we described wrath in the purgation cycle, and some of its causes, with an eye towards becoming more aware of our sins and purging such them from our lives. Now in the Illumination cycle, we focus more upon the virtues that us replace these sins in our soul.

Wrath can be a difficult sin to purge from our lives because it can be a righteous indignation; it can be based in real injustice. To these, we are sometimes called upon to respond in a way which will address the injustice and bring healing to the victims. More commonly, however, we simply enjoy being offended; we enjoy that feeling of self-righteousness. We like to have the moral high-ground, or to maintain our sense of victimization. And sometimes wrath isn't reaction to injustice, but only that our plans are frustrated; we can package these emotions in the language of injustice. Exhibit A: We have all heard children who don't get their way stomping their foot and proclaiming, "It just isn't fair!" This is the classic case of frustration disguised within the language of justice.

What virtue helps us battle this tendency toward wrath and self-indignation? Look at the parable we read this morning: it is about mercy and even more about courage; may I suggest that courage is the virtue we adopt in order to battle our sinful tendency towards wrath. We will come back to this in a bit, but let us set some groundwork from the epistle lesson first.

In today's epistle lesson from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, the Apostle takes us back to the cutting of the Abrahamic Covenant which is the very foundation of God's redemption of the world. Paul makes the argument that this covenant was primarily promissory in its nature.

In Genesis 17:7, God says to Abraham, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Now our English word for “seed” is very similar to the Hebrew word here. Both have are singular in form, but may refer to a quantity. We talk about seed, and we understand that we have many seeds together and not just one seed. But Paul, having the advantage of meeting Jesus and understanding the work of salvation wrought for us by Christ, sees through the common meaning of this word and, by divine inspiration, tells us that this word in its singularity points to Christ. Jesus is the seed that was promised to Abraham. In Jesus all mankind may become the sons and daughters of promise, the multitudes out of many nations.

Those in the Abrahamic covenant were marked by the covenantal sign of circumcision. This was the only requirement given in Genesis 17. In other words, God here promises to fulfill this covenant independent of the faith of Abraham’s descendants and humanity as a whole. Faith and obedience are required for individuals within the covenant, but God Himself guarantees that His salvation for the earth will come to pass in history. It is a covenantal promise. Salvation and redemption of the world is ultimately God’s doing. At a cosmic level, salvation is the work of God, and in His love for us, He deigns to allow us to participate in this work. But He is not dependent upon us, and even if all the powers in heaven and in earth were aligned against God, we could not thwart His promise to redeems the world.

This is St. Paul’s point here in Galatians. Salvation is of the Lord. It is something given to us through the Divine love of God, revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ. The Mosaic Law, the Mosaic covenant, came after the promise that God made to Abraham and therefore the law cannot abrogate the promise. Salvation is only of God. Our sanctification is only of God. He is the One shaping us and speaking to our hearts so that we would live into the righteous

calling with which we are called.

The injured man in our gospel lesson could not save himself, but was entirely dependent upon his Savior to restore Him. This is our situation. We too are entirely dependent upon God to save us. Faith is a gift of God to us. Growth in Holiness is a gift of God to us. This then is the basis for all of the good works which we offer back to God in love. The Law teaches us how far we are from God. It is Christ's grace that brings us back into fellowship with our Creator. Thus the epistle lesson ends, "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

This is reinforced for us in the very first sentence of the Gospel which reads, "BLESSED are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." The promise given to Abraham was realized in Jesus Christ 1500 years after it was given. We are blessed to see more fully God's plan for us and for mankind! We know that the messiah has come and suffered and died so that we could be restored to God. The ancient world waited in faith for God to reveal His plan. Generations upon generations passed, and then in Christ that waiting came to an end. Through Jesus Christ the Church was established, and we see the meaning of what so many of our brothers and sisters before us wrestled with.

But then, the gospel lesson pivots to this encounter between Jesus and this young lawyer. As a reminder, the biblical use of the word lawyer isn't one who argues criminal or civil cases before a jury, but rather it means a student of the Mosaic Law. This young man was a theologian wrestling with the Torah. Yet we note that he did not submit himself to the

mysteries of the Law which revealed the ethics of God. "But he," we read, "willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" He is attempting to use the law instead of submitting to it. According to the Apostle, the law was not given to us as a means whereby we could save ourselves any more than the injured man in the parable could have saved himself. "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." It was given to us to show us that we couldn't meet the requirements of God. The law teaches us that we are sinful; it does not give us a method to save ourselves. This would be a misunderstanding of its purpose.

This lawyer from the gospel lesson is struggling with the sin of wrath, for He feels like he deserves salvation. He is practically accusing God of not being fair. In his mind, he has kept the law, and therefore He wants Christ to affirm his obedience to the law as sufficient to satisfy God's requirements. He wants Jesus to say that he is good to go.

Instead of giving the lawyer a theological discourse, Christ responds by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, to illustrate that in fact this young lawyer *hasn't* fulfilled the law. Perhaps he has fulfilled the letter of the law, but the law is not given in a comprehensive closed form. It uses specific cases to demonstrate the larger principles of holiness, and these principles then shape our consciences and our moral sensibilities.

The first and second commandments, with which this lawyer tempted Jesus, are stated rather simply. But let us not think that they can be met simply. They cannot be exhaustively met, because the heart of the law isn't a list of do's and don'ts. Rather it is a relationship. God first establishes a position of generosity and abundance with us. This was emphasized to us in our psalm this morning, psalm 104, which describes the incredible and bountiful gifts of God

to us in the created world. We receive that abundance and then return it to God and to our neighbor. In a relationship, there is no meeting minimum standards and then being done. A relationship is a living thing that must be nurtured and tended continually. A neglected relationship dies. We do not merely check a box when it comes to loving God and neighbor. Love throws the check list out the window. It throws the sense of fairness, along with the associated anger that comes when our sense of fairness is violated, out the window. It sets its own desires aside and instead focuses upon the person at the other end of the relationship. All of this to say that the lawyer had not fulfilled the requirements of the law. He did not love His neighbor as Himself, and he presumed to use God's law instead of loving God, the author of the law.

We are too much like this lawyer when we indulge ourselves in wrath and indignation. We want to justify ourselves. We seek to rationalize away our contempt of those who we feel are below us or not deserving of our help. The priest and the Levite in the parable believed that they were not required to help the beaten man. There was no law requiring that they do so. They were important, and this injured man was not important and was not, therefore, deserving of their attention, let alone their help. But Christ implicitly condemns these characters, and He does not let the lawyer off of the hook. And He doesn't let us off of the hook either.

The conclusion to this lesson is found at the end of the gospel. This is the clarion call to all of us. "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." And this morning, Jesus says to us, "Go, and do thou likewise."

The gospel lesson starts with, Blessed are you, and ends with Go, and do thou likewise. We are blessed. We have been given everything we need for life and salvation through Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. In the security of this relationship, we are called to obedience. We know what we must do. And here is the role of courage: doing what we know we ought to do, even when we don't want to do it—even when it requires a sacrifice of time and resources—even when it causes harm to us. When we do what honors God at a cost to ourselves, this is courage. This is the virtue that we need to cultivate. Let us dwell upon the blessings that God has given us and then courageously follow His example. Wrath would expect others to accommodate our own sense of justice, but Courage tames the will of the self in order to serve God and man.

Today we are called to put off the indignation, and to nurture courage in its place. Let us, therefore, put aside that sense of entitlement, that sense that we deserve and shouldn't have to give or love. Let us instead, learn from Jesus. Take up the virtue of courage and sacrifice of yourself for the healing of others. Jesus is our Good Samaritan. May we heed His words. May we follow His example. Let us go and do likewise.

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