

SERMON: The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity

The First Lesson: Malachi 3:13-4:3

¹³ Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?

¹⁴ Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?

¹⁵ And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

¹⁶ Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

¹⁷ And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

¹⁸ Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

4 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

² But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

³ And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.

The Second Lesson: Luke 10:17-24

¹⁷ And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

¹⁸ And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

¹⁹ Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

²⁰ Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

²¹ In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

²² All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

²³ And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see:

²⁴ 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.

Psalm: 66

66 Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands:

² Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.

³ Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee.

⁴ All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah.

⁵ Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men.

⁶ He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him.

⁷ He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.

⁸ O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard:

⁹ Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.

¹⁰ For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

¹¹ Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins.

¹² Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

¹³ I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows,

¹⁴ Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble.

¹⁵ I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats. Selah.

¹⁶ Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

¹⁷ I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue.

¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

¹⁹ But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer.

²⁰ Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

Introduction

In my journey toward the Diaconate I have faced many struggles, felt isolated and confused, and even questioned aspects of my faith. I knew I was answering a call that God had put in my heart, but never expected it to be as difficult as it was at times. When I emailed Fr. Hawkins and asked to become an Aspirant I was still working in Criminal Justice. It was another time and place in my life and many times I felt like I should have waited until I retired to start the process. As much as I argued and rationalized, it became clear in my mind that God wanted me to start right then. My stress levels were high, my ability to concentrate was difficult and reading books on theology (written 100 years ago by British priests) was not easy. I had eight books to read, and each one required a reflection paper. Through the grace of God, I had some great mentors who offered wonderful advice, and I learned to trust God in a way I never had before. I also learned that God had given me talents I did not even know I had. I completed that portion of the process and entered the Postulancy. I remember thinking that while difficult, I had made it through the tough part. Unfortunately, I was wrong. After much discussion with the Board of Examining chaplains and personal reflection, I ended up enrolling in a master's program at Liberty University. This was a huge challenge to me and quickly brought me out of my comfort zone. I felt overwhelmed at times, and I once again leaned on Fr. Chris, my family, Ted and Mary Lou and really appreciated the support and encouragement from my church family. It was a challenging time, but I stayed on the path. After graduation I enrolled in St. Andrew's Theological Seminary to take some classes that were Anglican specific.

Throughout my time as a Postulant, I have also faced life and the challenges that come with that. I have dealt with feeling like I was not worthy of this calling and wanting to quit. I have felt overwhelmed and stressed out by the workload and deadlines of school. I have felt alienated by friends and even family when I explain why I want to dedicate my life to Christ. I have wanted to give up and I have even questioned whether God is even real. Repeatedly spiritual warfare came at me, in numerous ways, and with various levels of intensity. I had to learn to put on the Armor of God and trust that God brought me here and He would get me through it. One of my professors told me that the Enemy will fight you the hardest when you get close to meeting your goals or living as God wants you to live. The enemy knows how to disrupt you, how to tempt you, and how to move you away from God. The Enemy is cunning and will use your own thoughts and desires against you, all with the hope that you will stop trusting in God. What kept me going, repeatedly, was my faith in God, and the joy I had learned knowing that my future was known. I knew I needed to keep trusting God and keep moving forward.

Body

Jesus had sent out his disciples and they return with joy reporting victory over evil. Christ assures them authority over serpents and promises them nothing will harm them. (Luke 10:17-19)

A few weeks ago, Fr. Chris talked about the armor of God and how to utilize it to protect us against *“that enemy of yours, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* (1 Pet. 5:8)

In our Gospel reading from Luke, we see the disciples returning with joy in their hearts, obtaining victory over “serpents and scorpions” and hearing that “nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19). The serpents and scorpions in this verse are symbolic of the spiritual forces of evil that exist in our world. Jesus reminds them that even the demons are subject to His name. In this time in history, being a follower of Christ was often met with scorn, ridicule and hostility. Surely, while they were out, the followers of Jesus had to experience all of the assaults of the devil, as well as feeling insecure and hopeless. At times they even questioned why they were doing what they were doing but upon returning home, their overall emotion was joy. They learned that there is power in the name of Jesus. Through Him, Satan fell like lightning from the sky (Luke 10:19).

Jesus is proud of his disciples for going out and being successful. He cautions them to be humble despite having the spiritual power given them, and that they should rejoice because their names are written in heaven (they obtain salvation). (Luke 10:20-24)

In verse 20, Jesus turns the discussion to the true reason for their joy, not merely that they returned intact and with the power to thwart evil. The rebuke of Satan was good news, and cause for rejoicing, but their salvation was even better news, and cause for deepest joy. In a caring and gentle way, Jesus told them that they should rejoice in the fact of their salvation, rather than overcoming evil on their journey. This is their greatest reward, eternal life.

“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:20-21).

God the Father had chosen to reveal “these things” to “babes,” and to conceal them from “the wise and prudent.” “These things” are the knowledge of God’s salvation in the person and the work of the Messiah.

Context is key in understanding what Jesus means in this verse. The “wise and prudent” that Jesus refers to is referenced with irony, or even sarcasm. Our Lord is speaking about the wisdom of the world and the understanding of religion twisted by men and earthly thoughts. Their worldly understanding incited them to reject their Messiah to hold on to their authority on earth. In sharp contrast, the disciples are “children” who accept Jesus humbly, with no pretense or presumption, and are open to experience God’s glory and sovereignty in their lives. Because their humble hearts are not filled with religious pride or arrogance, they are better able to accept God’s revelation about His kingdom and the need for repentance. They also have eyes to see Jesus’ relationship with God the Father.

The sovereign God in salvation is referred to when Jesus spoke of the disciples’ salvation as “having their names written in heaven.” This imagery, often found in scripture, stresses the divine choice, made in eternity past, not the human decision made in time. When Jesus referred to His Father as “Lord of heaven and earth” in verse 21 it is the sovereignty of the

Father that is spoken of. God has the power to reveal the gospel to everyone and He desires that all people be saved. The fact that some people reject God while others accept Him, is not due to any lack of power within His sovereignty or any kind of deficit of His infinite love, but a consequence of free will.

Action

"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" (Luke 10:23).

Blessed are the eyes that understand the joy of salvation is to be experienced not only by the disciples who saw and heard and believed Jesus in His day, but by all who recognize Him to be God's Messiah, God's salvation, and who come to believe in Him. The joy of salvation is for all believers, who come to the same realization that the first believers did.

As we navigate life and face the spiritual warfare of the Devil, remember that in the name of Christ we can overcome it. When faced with feelings of discouragement, defeat, anxiety, stress, grief, loss, and temptation we can lean on God for comfort and the reassurance that in the end we will be with Him. When we feel fear, despair or anger, we can overcome them knowing God is with us. Our role, by the grace of God, is to resist temptation and overcome evil, stay in faith, and pray for God to fight alongside us and be there to comfort us while we are going through the trials. May we be able to say when our earthly life is over that "we fought the good fight of faith" and that we "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12)

Conclusion

Life can be a demanding thing to navigate, but thanks to God's goodness we do not have to go at it alone. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Ephesians what we are up against.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms." (Eph. 6:10-12)

It is the full armor of God consisting of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Holy Spirit that will allow us to persevere. Along with the power of prayer and the Word of God, we can stand against the temptations of the Enemy and live a godly, righteous, and sober life. It is through our worship of God, that we come to a greater understanding of His promises and begin to recognize the cost of the Cross of Christ and can be comforted by the blessed assurance of the Lord's plan for our future and our salvation.

To the only wise God, our savior, Be glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.
Amen