

Sermon for November 2nd, 2025

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Revelation 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" **11** And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12** saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" **14** I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Psalm 149

1 Praise the LORD!

Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!

2 Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!

3 Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

4 For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.

5 Let the godly exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their beds.

6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,

7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishments on the peoples,

8 to bind their kings with chains
and their nobles with fetters of iron,

9 to execute on them the judgment written!
This is honor for all his godly ones.

Praise the LORD!

1 John 3:1-3

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Our text for meditation this All Saints' Day is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount begins with what we call the Beatitudes, the set of blessings that our Lord Jesus pronounces on people with certain traits. Let's get something out of the way, and here I choose to engage in a crass complaint. The way in which this passage is used to manipulate people into a weird false vision of Christianity, and the way that people have *rejected* Christianity on account of that false vision, is perverse. I agonized over how exactly to preach on this passage *precisely* because of this stupid bad-faith dynamic that gets passed around by false teachers and anti-Christians alike.

This confusion is absolutely everywhere my friends, to the maddening point where people are rejecting Christianity without even reading this passage for themselves. Christ says the poor in spirit are blessed; a monk takes up that verse, claims that Jesus demands vows of poverty and starts telling everyone that they should be poor; then the conservative rejects Jesus because he doesn't want to be homeless! Jesus says the meek shall inherit the earth; some stupid pacifist trumpets that as support for his limp-wristed worldview and then men hear this and reject Christianity because they don't want to be wimps. And on and on it goes. To this day, just typing in “Beatitudes” in a search engine will show you endless examples of would-be theologians turning Christianity into a religion for losers, and idiots taking those teachers at their word as a pathetic excuse to reject salvation.

On account of this dynamic there is so much nonsense out there. What is to be done about it? Well, the only way to solve this problem is to teach the text for what our Lord is actually saying. Let us not waste our time trying to refute the distortions made by evil men, nor spend hours and hours reassuring nonbelievers (who won't listen anyway) that those other guys are wrong. For lack of a better way of putting it, we must simply dive into the text and become stronger Christians.

Whom does Christ Address?

St. Matthew records that Jesus went up a mountain (likely a very large hill for our modern understanding), and His *disciples* went to Him. He reserves this teaching for those who already believe in Him, and who come to listen to what He has to say. These are already disciples, and so they do not apply to those who do not believe. When Christ says someone is blessed, this *does not apply* to someone who doesn't belong to Him. A nonbeliever can be poor in spirit, mourning, meek, desiring righteousness, merciful, seeking purity, a peacemaker and persecuted – absolutely none of that will bring him blessing from on high. This is a message solely for the *Saints*.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the assumption that whoever is listening is already a disciple. If you are Baptized and believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again on the third day *for you*, then all the treasury of Heaven is flung open to you, and our Heavenly Father looks upon you with nothing but Grace and love. But if someone does not believe, there is no point in sharing this teaching with them. Our Lord went up *away* from the braying crowds, and this sermon was only delivered to those who by all means were saved. And being assured that they were, our Lord sets about teaching them – and us – what it *looks like* to have a Christian personality. This is who His followers shall become, how the Saints come to behave as they grow in the faith.

The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This does not mean the physically poor, but spiritually poor. Over time, the believer will have a loose grip on his or her possessions whether they are physically rich or not. We recognize that our true wealth is in eternity, and can be content in all situations whether we have plenty or are in want.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

We are told here that the mournful are comforted, but elsewhere Scripture tells us to rejoice always.¹ This leads us to ask, what exactly are we mourning over? Well, the Christian grows to understand sorrow over his own sin, sorrow over seeing tragedy and injustice in this world, and at the same time holds a deep abiding joy in the salvation by which God promises to *fix* everything sorrowful in the world. We end up becoming a more *moral* people because we are aware that something is *wrong*.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

By “meek,” our Lord means that the Christian is not a bully. He does not browbeat, rob, or intimidate people with his power, but uses it for good things in this life. Believers are loathe to see violence as the first resort in any conflict, let alone the nastier and sneakier ways to use power like blackmail or sabotage. When Christ says the meek shall inherit the earth, He means it: He fits us for our royal estate in the latter days by training us for our eternal rulership with Him over the universe.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

This is related to the second. As we learn to mourn over our own sin and the ugliness that infects the world, at the same time we begin to foster a true desire to see *cleansing*, both in our *own* character and in the world around us. Christ promises to us that we shall see that day and be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

As Christ has been merciful to us, so are we to be merciful to others. As He has forgiven us our sins, so too must we forgive those who sin against us. Certainly we still oppose our enemies, but as mercy grows within our hearts we wish to see them *stopped* more than exacting some orchestrated fantasy of revenge.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

1 1 Thessalonians 5:16

In a word, the purity of heart that our Lord speaks of is a clean conscience. The believer does his best to live according to the Word of God, and when some sin or impurity occurs within his heart, he goes to our Lord for forgiveness so that he can go right back to living properly. Christians must not be hypocrites!

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

St. Paul elaborates on this line of thinking by saying “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”² While conflict is unavoidable in some senses, the Christian is an adult about it. We don't start fights over stupid matters, we don't solve everything with violence, and we prefer to settle everything without any casualties if it can be helped. And why is this the case? Because our Heavenly Father gave us life and peace, He loves life and peace, and He would see to it that we preserve both of these as much as we can.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

These are the same blessing for the same dynamic. Everybody on earth suffers, but the Christian who lives for God and follows His ways suffers for a good cause. Surely, people are persecuted out there for various political and religious causes; sometimes they deserve it, other times they are just unfortunate. But the Christian suffering for his faith is suffering despite there being nothing wrong and everything right with his beliefs. And since his faith in Christ deserves none of the pains of persecution, God sees to it that the believer is as richly rewarded as the prophets of old were. He shall make it right!

Christ Fulfills ALL of the Beatitudes

To finish up, we ought to be aware that at the end of the day Jesus is pointing to Himself in all of these things. No one has ever been poorer in spirit than the Son of God who humbled Himself to being born in a human body in a dirty little manger. No one has mourned more than our Savior who took all our sins upon Himself and felt the Father turning His face away. No one is more meek than Christ, who did not use His omnipotent power to destroy those who blasphemed Him to His own face. No one hungered and thirsted more for righteousness than our Savior, for He died so that *billions* of people in the future would counted righteous through faith in Him. No one is more merciful than Jesus, who freely offers everyone forgiveness and life in His Name no matter how much sin they have committed. No one has made peace as much as Jesus has and will – especially in terms of the peace He makes between us and His Father. And indeed, Jesus Christ suffered the worst persecution there is, having committed no sin whatsoever but still being murdered by those ugly authorities who hated the truth He told.

This means that Jesus Christ is all these things *normally*, but in His ministry He is all these things *for you* my friends. If you believe in Jesus, you must not worry that you haven't been enough of a peacemaker in life. You do not need to fret as though not being poor enough in spirit means you shall not inherit eternity. Instead, let us breathe a sigh of relief as our Savior tells us “I got this,” and receive

blessing from our Heavenly Father on Christ's account. If you believe in Jesus, you are counted as being the peacemaker, the meek one, the persecuted one, and pure in heart – even if you do not match up with your deeds.

Indeed, these are lofty and virtuous ideals to strive for in life, that we must serve and honor our Lord by trying our best to be like Him! By the help of the Holy Spirit we indeed shall find ourselves doing so as time goes on. But that does not require us to go off and be monks or pacifists, and we are under no obligations reject Christ's teachings which do not require us to be such ugly pseudo-Christians. Instead, let us walk in His strength and in the confidence that His obedience will bring us to greater maturity in the faith.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for November 9th, 2025
TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS
Genesis 1:1-2:3

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. **3** And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” **7** And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. **8** And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. **10** God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **13** And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, **15** and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. **16** And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” **21** So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **22** And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” **23** And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. **25** And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” **29** And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. **30** And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. **31** And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. **2** And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. **3** So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Psalm 8

1 O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
4 what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
7 all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
9 O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Ephesians 6:10-20

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all

circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, **18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

John 4:46-54

46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. **47** When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. **48** So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” **49** The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” **50** Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. **51** As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. **52** So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” **53** The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. **54** This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

Our text for meditation this Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Our Lord Jesus goes to Cana for this healing. Truly, this must have been the only thing He was there for: He goes to Samaria and speaks with the woman at the well, then He goes to Cana and heals the official's child, and then heads to Jerusalem. St. John reminds us that Cana was the place where He gave us the first official “sign” miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding, and the last verse of the passage emphasizes this as the *second* sign. So our Lord wants us to pay attention to the miracle itself and the *message* that He gives us before He accomplishes the healing.

So what exactly is our Lord saying with His words and actions here? He goes to Capernaum, speaks with the official, heals the official's son, and leaves. If we were reading this in Matthew or Mark or Luke's Gospels, we would not bat an eye at it; each of these three, called together the “Synoptic” Gospels,¹ includes plenty of Christ's miracles that happen over the course of His ministry. But St. John wrote about comparatively few of them, because he assumes that we have read the Synoptics already. Every one of the “sign” miracles then is something with a special *point* he wants to show us from Jesus's time here on earth.

Signs and Faith

So what is so important here? The official's son is dying. Our Lord responds to this information by telling the man and everyone around him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Plenty of Christ's miracles were accompanied by messages He gave, but this makes for quite a short sermon! What did Jesus mean by this? Was it a statement of contempt? If we read these words aloud,

¹ Synoptic meaning “seeing the whole together.” Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels on account of their similarities. St. John's Gospel includes the things that the other Gospel writers left out.

we might well conclude that our Lord was grumpy. After all, if you got sick and went to the doctor, you would think the doctor was angry with you if he only answered you with a single prickly comment!

But is Christ truly expressing contempt? Is He saying “you despicable, hard-hearted fools, I can only get through to you people if you see supernatural things, like jingling keys in front of a baby?” Nothing of the sort, thankfully. The text shows us that what Jesus says is simply fact; when the man saw that his son had been healed, he and his whole household believed. The intention of His statement is more to *teach* the official than to condemn. It is so that after he believes, he will see that Christ was the One who provided him faith through the miracle. And the disciples – both the Apostles and us – are to see this and learn from it as well.

The Bound Will

There is nothing special about the people of Galilee or the official with his sick son. They are not the only ones who require miraculous intervention to be brought to faith. We are *all* like that, my friends. Original sin, that is our sinful nature, keeps us from voluntarily seeking the true God and appealing to Him for salvation. No nonbeliever wakes up one morning, gets his coffee and says of his own volition “you know what? I think I’ll become a Christian today.” No one who lives in the darkness of sin, being led around by the devil, makes the free choice to believe. Certainly, they make *other* free choices, but their nature is too corrupted by wickedness to make the first move.

This is what our Lord is getting at. In order for someone to believe in Him, God makes the first move. He makes the offer to bring about faith, all we can choose is whether to receive it or resist what He is trying to do. He presents Himself through these signs and wonders, offers to change our hearts and renew our spirits, to make us *different* than we once were; if we accept it, He saves us by bringing us to true faith.

How do signs work?

So when it comes to conversion, to becoming saved, we are exactly like the official at Cana. We need to see signs and wonders or else we shall not believe. But what does Jesus mean by signs? Does He only mean miraculous wonders, like a child being healed of a deadly sickness? Yes, but insofar as the sign has to do with the Word. One does not have to be present to see that the sign has taken place. St. John records that the official's entire family believed. But they believed *after* the healing had taken place, and especially after discussing the matter! The official himself believed before he saw that his son was healed. It was not the healing itself, but the Word concerning the One who healed. As St. Paul says, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.”²

You may be wondering to yourself, “this is all well and good. The official and his family believed after the Word accompanied the sign. Well we have the Word, pastor. Where is the sign? Which sign do we believe?” And I am glad you asked. The sign is this, that a Man died for your sins and rose again from the dead. The Resurrection is that sign and miracle by which all men who hear of it may be brought to faith. We may not have been there at the empty tomb, and we may not have seen His Ascension into Heaven, but like the official of Cana's household – many of whom were not there when the boy was healed – we hear the *Word* concerning this most important sign, we see the *effects* concerning it, and we rejoice to receive the faith as well.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for November 16th, 2025
TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 6:1-8

- 1** Hear what the LORD says:
Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
- 2** Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.
- 3** “O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I wearied you? Answer me!
- 4** For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.
- 5** O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”
- 6** “With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
- 7** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
- 8** He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Psalm 116:12-19

- 12** What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?
- 13** I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
- 14** I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
- 15** Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.

16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

Philippians 1:3-11

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, **4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **7** It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.
23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Our text for meditation this Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

The past is a foreign country to us, and the further back you go in history the more alien it becomes to us. There are now two generations of people born who have not lived without the internet, gen Z and gen Alpha, and they literally cannot imagine what life was like. Even if you took a twenty year old man and put him in a town with no internet connectivity for a month, he would filter the experience through *comparison* with his life online. In the same way, most of us cannot imagine a life without cars or roads. If we were required to go to some quaint village with no automobiles for a month, most of us would feel trapped there simply because there is no mechanized ability to escape. Maybe we could *imagine* what it was like two hundred years ago, to be without cars or the internet, but we cannot live that experience without it being and feeling alien to us. This, with other things like running water and modern medicine, separates us from the ancients in too many ways to count. We simply take too many things for granted.

Christians living today also suffer from this feeling when it comes to the Old Covenant. We understand *what* the Mosaic Law said and we can read the requirements placed on the faithful to stay in relationship with our Lord, but we cannot understand what it was *like*. And no, looking at the way Jews live today does not count; there is no Temple nor tabernacle nor Ark of the Covenant standing for the Jews to live in an accurate “Old Testament” way. We do not even know what their Temple furnishings *looked* like, since these were all gone by the time the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Meanwhile, we have lived with the privilege of being part of the New Covenant. We understand that God has sent His only Son to die for our sins and rise again so that we may have the full assurance of salvation. We live in great freedom as well; we do not have to get our sons circumcised, we can eat pretty much whatever we want, we have few clothing regulations and we do not have to make sacrifices. I have gotten a good number of tattoos, something verboten under the Old Covenant, and I stand in confidence that I have not sinned in the slightest by getting them.

This New Covenant reality often leads to us being too quick to judge the men and women of Israel during the Old Covenant times. While the Church praises men like Abraham or David, we point our fingers at the Israelites who fell into baal worship or gross sins, as though we are better than them. Yes, their apostasy was evil, but condemning it is meaningless if we have not even tried to understand *what it was like*. Today's Old Testament reading gives us a window into their point of view. We may not understand it fully, but Micah gives us a hint.

The Exasperated Israelite

God tells the Northern Kingdom of Israel that He has an indictment. Many prophets had come to Israel to condemn their sins and command them to repent, but now it is time to go to court, and our Lord Himself will be the prosecutor. Micah the prophet has to serve as the unhappy middleman between the two, going around and making this proclamation from God to the people and seeing how they respond. God's case is this: “What have I done to you? How have I wearied you?” In light of the good things God has done, for the children of Israel to engage in half-hearted worship and flirt with idolatry and consider His ways a *burden* is downright insulting. After all, our Lord reasons, He has brought them out of Egyptian slavery, given them prophets, and blessed them; even when a pagan king Balak paid the prophet Balaam to curse them, God promised more blessings! What more could they want? How could they respond to all of this goodness from God with “weariness?”

Shockingly, we actually have the Israelites' response in this passage. Micah relates that they point to the offering system and amplify it. They have come to the conclusion that God is *unpleasable*, and they downright *explode* their discontent towards our Lord. It is as if they were to say,

“Oh, You're mad again, Lord? Like You always are? You send us prophet after prophet telling us how bad we are all the time. Never any praise,

never any promises. Oh yes, You blessed us alright, blessed us with dour oracles and this heavy Law yoked around our necks like an anchor pulling down a sinking boat! You told us with the Law to make sacrifices to expiate our sin, and we do that, and yet here You are still mad! So what is it You want? Are the sacrifices not enough? Here then, have another sterling year-old calf that my family won't get to eat because You are upset again. Oh, what's that? You're *angry again*? Fine, have a *thousand* rams, a *thousand* rivers of oil! Still not enough? It's NEVER enough! What, should we sacrifice our children to You? Is that it, you want us to suffer? WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

This was their argument, and honestly I imagine there was something of a pause before Micah relayed God's response to them. The prophet must have been taken aback! The people were doing what they could under the Mosaic code that had been given to them, and it never seemed like they were doing enough, they never got the “attaboy” that we all crave to hear from God. Sure, the prophet could argue that the Israelites in the northern territory had been following a corrupted system. He could bring up that Jeroboam instituted the wrong priest system and that God did not approve of their two temples and so many other flaws,¹ but what would *that* accomplish? These people were not *born* in Judah where the true Temple was, and it was not like they could immigrate there, since the children of Judah were likely to keep them out – just before Micah wrote his book, Israel and Judah had just been at war!² So even if they wanted to, they could not fix these problems. The prophet, unhappy as he was, had to wait for a response from on high.

God's Answer

The answer God gives must have been even more puzzling to him. “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This is to say, He wants their hearts. The sacrifices and ceremonies wouldn't do anything, even if these people did them correctly. God wants them to start doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, and He wants them to love kindness – His kindness, surely, but also for them to be kinder to their neighbors. This is all well and good, Micah must have thought, but the prophets had been saying that to them for centuries and it *did not answer their question*.

The Israelites ask God how exactly they are supposed to gain forgiveness for all of these sins, and God never answers the question. Remember my friends, they are under the *Old Covenant*, where the full Gospel had not been revealed. You and I can listen to any sermon and hear the Gospel, that our sins have been forgiven by the shed blood of our Savior on a Roman cross. *We* get to hear that sacrifices are not necessary, because we know that Jesus Himself was the final sacrifice for sin; back then, neither the prophets nor even the angels knew what the plan was.³ God kept the plan of salvation hidden so that nothing could be done to prevent it.⁴ So what is the message God gives the Northern Israelites? “Walk humbly with your God.” This is to say, He tells them “*Trust Me*.” He'll take care of their sins, He will do something, but in the meantime they must rely on Him without knowing the details and work on their character.

After this, the prophet details even more defects in Israel's national character, explaining why they are to go into Exile. Micah's response to this entire episode is to become completely miserable, until God gives him an oracle telling the children of Israel (and him) that they should wait on God's

1 1 Kings 12:25-33

2 The Syro-Ephraimite War, waged in 735 B.C., 2 Kings 16.

3 1 Peter 1:10-12

4 1 Corinthians 2:6-8

later mercies.⁵ But the difficulties and frustrations persisted for another seven hundred and fifty years, until Christ went to the Cross and rose again to justify all who believe in Him.

Conclusion

My friends, it is safe to say that living under the Old Covenant was difficult. Being so far in the past, the men and women living under it had an entirely different experience than we have, such that we cannot even begin to imagine it. Surely, the past is a foreign country. But with passages like this, we understand at least that their experience was a painful, frustrating one with only the slightest hope to live with day to day. St. Peter, commenting on the Old Covenant, says that the yoke was something “that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”⁶ But this is why they rejoiced so much at everything Jesus did for us! This is why St. Paul celebrated freedom from the Law, why the author of Hebrews triumphantly brings up the New Covenant over and over again in his book.⁷ No longer do men have to wallow in the fog of uncertainty when it comes to their sins. No more do they have to groan with the men of Israel that they cannot shed so much blood anymore. No longer do they have to fear that some infraction will lead to their merciless death.⁸ *Now* men have Christ, and the good news that they have forgiveness, freedom, and salvation in His Name. *Now* men know that the terrible yoke of the Law has been taken off of their necks and shattered, and even the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, does not accuse the soul of one living in penitent faith.

We may not know exactly what the old Israelites were thinking, what life was like for them, or how it felt to live under the old system. But we can look at passages like this, and see the joy of the Apostles and the rest of the early Church, and have the same joy. Let us meditate on how our Lord has freed us from our *own* former religions, which were even more oppressive and dour than what the Israelites had (even if we did not notice it). Let us take hold of the joy set before all the saints in the salvation and freedom won for us by our Lord Jesus.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁵ Micah 6:9-7:20

⁶ Acts 15:10

⁷ All seventeen uses of the word “Covenant” in Hebrews are in comparison between the Old and the New, celebrating that the New had superseded the Old.

⁸ Hebrews 10:28

Sermon for November 23rd, 2025
CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

READINGS

Isaiah 65:17-25

17 “For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.

19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress.

20 No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labor in vain
or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,
and their descendants with them.

24 Before they call I will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
and dust shall be the serpent's food.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain,”
says the LORD.

Psalm 149

(Collect verses in **bold**)

1 Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,

his praise in the assembly of the godly!
2 Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!
**3 Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!**
**4 For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.**
**5 Let the godly exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their beds.**
6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishments on the peoples,
8 to bind their kings with chains
and their nobles with fetters of iron,
9 to execute on them the judgment written!
This is honor for all his godly ones.
Praise the LORD!

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Matthew 25:1-13

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Our text for meditation this final Sunday of the Church Year is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Our Old Testament reading is confusing and difficult to interpret. But that said, it is critical that I preach on it to prevent confusion. Is Isaiah prophesying about the end of the world? If so, then why does he talk about men dying and sinning? But if he's prophesying about something else, then we have to ask why God would tell the prophet He is creating a new Heavens and a new earth! If I did not engage in a more exegetical sermon here, I would be neglecting my pastoral duties and leaving people horribly confused.

Isaiah's Near and Far

To understand our reading, we need to be aware that Isaiah has a habit of mixing prophecies together. This dynamic, mixing short-term and long-term prophecies, permeates the entire Book of Isaiah. For instance, in Isaiah 7 he gives the prophecy concerning the Virgin Birth, which tells us “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”¹ But he says this to verify that a *near* event, the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, will happen before then. Why does he do this? After all, the Virgin Birth occurs over seven hundred years after he prophesied about it! It is because he is speaking to two audiences. On the one hand, Isaiah speaks to people in ancient Israel and Judah, beckoning them to come to true faith; on the other hand, he speaks to the Church that has already received the Gospel – to us! – so that we can see the faithfulness of God. How do we know that the Virgin Birth happened just as Sts. Matthew and Luke said it did? Because Samaria fell to the Assyrians, just as Isaiah prophesied. How did the children of Judah know that a Virgin Birth *must* happen in their future? Because they were able to see the same thing happen during their lifetimes, thus learning that the latter sign would occur.

So Isaiah stands in the middle of time, speaking to two audiences, and our reading continues that style of prophecy, *mixing* the near and the far. The first part of the chapter is an oracle that the prophet is giving against the children of Israel, in which those who trust in and worship God shall be spared while the ones who rebel against Him shall go off into Exile and death. But then we start this passage, where our Lord says that He will create “new heavens and a new earth,” and he begins blending things together. The soon-fulfilled prophecy of exile for the Israelites and the children of Judah is *mixed* with the far-off prophecy of the Last Day and the Resurrection of the Dead: *near* and *far* are both present in the text.

Jerusalem

Allow me to give an example of this. When the Lord says “I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness,” this applies in more than one way. Jerusalem was rebuilt under Zechariah the governor and Ezra the scribe, just a few centuries after Isaiah wrote this. The desolation of Judah was finally reversed as the Persian empire permitted the children of Judah to rebuild their ancestral capitol. During that time, Jerusalem was indeed a joy, as it meant a revitalization of the faith and people once more stood in the knowledge that God supported them. Their exile was over, and they could breathe easy knowing that the Covenant was not forgotten.

But at the same time, there is a *heavenly* Jerusalem that is under construction as we speak. Our Savior tells the Apostles, “I go to prepare a place for you,”² and this Jerusalem is the place to which He refers. There is a new home, a *real* home, which Jesus is preparing for all who believe in Him. St. John the Apostle *sees* this Heavenly Jerusalem come down to earth in his vision of the last days. God creates it to be a joy, and because it shall last forever He tells us “be glad and rejoice *forever*” in the eighteenth verse. Isaiah proclaims both, weaving them together.

Life

We see the same dynamic in the next few verses as well. God says that He will rejoice in

1 Isaiah 7:10-17

2 John 14:2-3

Jerusalem as well, and preserve the lives of everyone there. Indeed, after the Babylonian Exile, Jerusalem was a safe harbor that did not see violence for centuries. Infants were born without the threat of their mothers being killed or sold into slavery by enemy soldiers. Men were able to grow old and live out their years – even unto a full century! And of course, there were villains who were deemed accursed by virtue of their longer lifespans. God says that they shall build and plant without having to worry about someone else taking over the land; up until the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, this was true – and it was true for a couple centuries *after* the Maccabean revolt that kicked Antiochus out.

But this does not satisfy the full text. Jerusalem being under Jewish control does not require a New Heavens and a New Earth! The return from Exile does not include animals no longer eating meat or snakes eating dust. Mankind's lifespan did not become the indefinite *forever* that a healthy tree enjoys, yet the prophet says these things shall happen. It is just that the matter of living in your body forever is the *latter* prophecy to be fulfilled. One day there shall be no more death, no more sin, and no more of the tragedies that man has faced since the fall in Eden.

Why this dynamic?

So when we read this passage, we are called to look at two separate things Isaiah is prophesying. On the one hand, the prophet speaks of the restoration of earthly Jerusalem after God permits Israelites and the children of Judah to return to the land. On the other hand, he prophesies about the Resurrection, and the blessed eternity given to all who believe in Jesus. Both matters are present, and he does not separate them. Why is this the case?

The first and foremost reason for this dynamic is that it kept the enemies of God from preventing the Atonement from taking place. The prophets, especially Isaiah, wrote their Messianic predictions vaguely enough so that the devil and his servants would never guess how God was going to enact the plan of salvation. Scripture attests that “none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”³ If the prophets wrote clearly that Jesus of Nazareth, being fully God and fully man, being born in Bethlehem from the Virgin Mary, dying 33 years later on a Roman cross but rising again on the third day, and permitting whosoever believe in Him to live eternally... well, suffice it to say they would never have allowed the Crucifixion! Satan does not *want* your sins forgiven. He does not *want* us living eternally, for he wants every human being burning in the lake of fire with him when Judgment Day comes. By hiding the prophecies of the Gospel and the Return of Christ, our Heavenly Father ensured that His Will for our salvation would be accomplished.

The other reason is this my friends: these sorts of double prophecies are there for our edification. The verification of one prophecy by another is firmly established in Isaiah's writing. We know that the Virgin Birth truly happened because Isaiah's other prophecy, the fall of Samaria, that most certainly happened. We know that his other prophecies concerning Christ were fulfilled, just as we know his prophecies about Persia, Babylon, and Judah all came true. And when we get to this passage, we rejoice to know that because earthly Jerusalem was restored, that our abundant life in the Heavenly Jerusalem is assured. Though it may appear as though Christ has delayed His return, though we can look at the past two thousand years and be tempted to sadness at the length of waiting, Isaiah comes to minister to us through his writings and reassures us that our God is faithful, and that Christ shall most certainly return to abolish death and bring us to everlasting happiness.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for November 30th, 2025
FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Jeremiah 23:5-8

5 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **6** In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

7 “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ **8** but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.”

Psalms 24

- 1** The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,
2 for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.
3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.
5 He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.
6 Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*
7 Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is this King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!
9 Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory! *Selah*

Romans 13:8-14

8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. **9** For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.
11 Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. **12** The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us

cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. **13** Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Matthew 21:1-11

1 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 “Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” **10** And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” **11** And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday in Advent is on our Old Testament reading

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

I have a question for you. It may sound a little sacrilegious to ask it, and it might be a bit uncomfortable, but it is one that every human being asks at one point in their lives. In fact, it is a question that burns within us whenever we get burned. When the cancer diagnosis comes in, when we have to put a beloved pet out of their misery, and when there isn't enough money for Christmas presents this year, this question rises up in our hearts. Christians answer it a number of ways, while nonbelievers answer it the wrong way. And the question is this: how do you know that God is good? Especially when times are bad, how do we know?

The theologians are often the first to answer this with a tautology, or non-answer. They mean well, but I cannot tell you how often I have heard a man, whose nose is always shoved in some dogmatics textbook, say that “God is good because God is good.” Oh they will use more words than that - “God is Good because goodness is inherent in His nature, having benevolence as an essential attribute which is proper to His eternal existence as the maximally great Being” - or something similar to that. But still, their answer to the question amounts to “God is good because God is good.” The dry, dusty imaginations of such persons really do seem to imagine that this is a satisfactory answer to our longing.

There is another answer that comes from well-meaning people that just doesn't work. Sadly this is the most common one among Christians, especially those who do not read their Bibles very much. Their answer boils down to either feelings or circumstances. “How do we know God is good? Ah, but don't you ever just think about His love and feel that swelling in your heart?” “Oh but we're having a good time over here, so it seems to me that God is very good – just look at all these blessings!” Now certainly we sometimes *feel* that God is good, but that does not mean that we *know* He is good. And we might enjoy some blessings in life, but when times get tough it is harder for us to *notice* those

blessings, let alone learn from them!

While there are plenty of eager answerers out there, few actually sit down and listen to what God says about it. When we ask, “how do I know God is good?” He gives us one consistent answer throughout all the pages of Scripture. He says to us, “I have shown you.” He calls us to remember what He has done in the past, all of His righteous and mighty deeds, and for us to believe on account of these firm facts. But He especially wants us to look toward the latest.

The Goodness of God in History

My friends, God has given us a faith that is rooted in *history*. We are to look at how He has revealed His goodness to us, so that we may look forward to the good things He has promised. Adam and Eve, cast out from the Garden of Eden, knew full well that God had shown them His benevolence by the existence of the Garden itself; because of this, they could trust that one Day He would send someone to destroy the work of the serpent and bring them back to Paradise.¹ They told their children about this, and expected them to *remember* as a fact of history that God had shown them good and promised them redemption.

Noah and his family survived the Great Flood. They saw that God had delivered them from disaster by having Noah build the Ark, and they heard our Lord bless them with a new Covenant;² He promised to never flood the world again. From that moment on, the descendants of Noah and his sons were to look back on the Flood, on the survival of men and animals through the Ark, and trust that God would maintain great mercy for them. To remind us all of this moment in history, our Lord established the rainbow in the sky as a sign that He has not forgotten this promise.

Many other moments like these have happened, where our Lord demonstrated His perfect righteousness and goodness, His justice and mercy. One which is particularly emphasized is the Exodus, wherein the Israelites were delivered out of Egyptian bondage. God showed them His justice as He punished the heartless Egyptians with civilization-destroying plagues, including the Passover which killed the firstborn in all the land. He showed them His mercy by inviting everyone to save their children's lives by placing Lamb's blood on their doors – and many Egyptians took Him up on the offer, departing Egypt alongside the Lord's people.³ For centuries after this, the Israelites and the children of Judah expressed their remembrance by saying “As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” Remembering the Exodus was how they knew that God would fulfill His promises of future deliverance.

Jeremiah records that things would change though. The Exodus would not be forgotten, but the return from Exile would be fresher in their memories. God sent the children of Israel into captivity under Assyria, and He sent the children of Judah into Exile in Babylon, but just as He promised, they were allowed to return home and rebuild the country in peace. From that moment onward for *centuries*, they expressed the remembrance with “As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.” This historical event was proof to them that one day God would send the Messiah, the righteous Branch from David's line, to deliver the people.

If you were to ask a believer in the 4th century B.C., “How do you know God is good?” his answer would be this, that our Lord brought his people back from Exile and let them return to the Promised Land. But now, our answer to this question is simple; it starts with a manger in Bethlehem, and it ends with an ascension into Heaven. Just as He promised, God sent His only Son to die for our sins, and rose Him up on the third day from the dead. We live in full assurance that because of this fact of history, God loves us and has shown us His goodness – both in His justice against sins and mercy for sinners with the Crucifixion of Jesus. He shows us His infinite Grace with the Resurrection, which is

1 Genesis 3:15

2 Genesis 9:8-17

3 Exodus 12:1-39

extended from Christ to the believer through faith. My friends, you do not have a God that merely *tells* you that He is good – you have a God who *shows* you that He is good!

Conclusion

As we begin this year's Advent season, we will be meditating on this dynamic, that God *demonstrates* His goodness unto all men. He calls us to remember what He has done in the past, that we may live in stronger faith that He shall do even more good in the future. The examples that I gave, from Eden to the Flood to the Exodus to the Return of the Exiles, all the way to the Crucifixion of our Lord, these are not the only things He has done! But in remembering them, we walk forward in the comfort of knowing that His promise of the Second Advent – Christ's Return – is sure to happen. May we thus walk through this month in gratitude and faith.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.