

SERMON – THE FIRST SUNDY AFTER TRINITY – 23 JUNE 2019

St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Father Tyler W. Phass

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

One of the greatest assets of the Church is the lectionary. However, this is not always self-evident. Day after day and week after week, the Church reads assigned portions of the Holy Scriptures known as lections. These lections cause us to experience the life of Our Lord, since they are the inspired words of divine revelation. They also make clear to us the dogmas and doctrines of Christ's most holy religion. The lectionary also unites Christians, one to another, in a way that transcends both time and space; it does so by placing us in a linear tradition of common prayer and worship with the whole people of God.

The tradition of using an established lectionary for the public reading of the Scriptures is a very ancient practice, one that predates even Christianity itself. When we read from the lectionary, we follow in the steps of our forefathers. The use of the lectionary is so ancient that it even links us to the worship practices of the faithful people of God who lived centuries before the Incarnation of Our Lord.

From the texts of Holy Scriptures, we learn that the use of a lectionary was practiced in the synagogue and temple worship of the Jewish people. Jesus Himself even read the Scriptures from a lectionary, as we are told in the 4th Chapter of the Gospel of Luke: "...there [in the synagogue] was delivered unto [Jesus] the book of the prophet [Isaiah]...And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.'"

In the above text from Saint Luke's Gospel, Jesus (1) receives the appointed text to be read on that day of worship, (2) reads it, and (3) sits down to preach on the same. This pattern is still followed today by our ministers who first (1) discern which text is to be read from the lectionary, (2) read the assigned text in the presence of the people, and (3) then proceed to preach upon the same.

It is important to note that the appointed texts of the lectionary are not random or loosely related to one another, but rather, are carefully chosen so as to construct the many themes that together make up the greatest theme of the Church: the Liturgical Year. The Liturgical Year can be divided into two sections: (1) Advent Season to Trinity Sunday and (2) all of the Sundays After Trinity. During the first half, the lectionary focuses our attention upon the Life of our Lord and during the second half, it focuses our attention upon our Life in Him.

Often times, when we pray the Daily Office or go to Mass, we miss out on the thematic arrangement of the lections that are read. This is to our great disadvantage. Even though it can be difficult to discern at times, and quite frankly, requires a bit of work on our part, we ought to spend both time and effort reflecting on the lectionary and its themes. Some ways to go about

practicing and developing this discipline is to either think about how the Gospel and Epistle lessons relate to one another each Sunday or by thinking about how the theme of each Sunday relates to the themes of the preceding and following Sundays.

If you were at mass last Wednesday, you will remember that I encouraged you to reflect upon why it may be that today's Gospel is the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. You will also remember that I hinted at the importance of the presence of Moses in both last week's Gospel and today's Gospel. Let us now consider the Parable and how it relates to last week's Gospel and the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

If you were to put last Sunday's Gospel and today's Gospel side-by-side, you would notice that both of these texts mention the greatest prophet of the Old Testament: Moses. Last week, as Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, He said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Today, Jesus again mentions Moses, only this time, through the voice of a character in His parable. In the parable, we are told that it is Abraham, the forefather of the Faith, who says to the Rich Man, "If [your brothers] hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

So what does Moses have to do with Trinity Season and why does his presence in these two Gospel Lessons make them the perfect choice for both Trinity Sunday and the First Sunday After Trinity?

Moses was the greatest Prophet of the Old Testament. He was the one who served as the mediator between God and His People, Israel. We learn in the Scriptures that Moses knew that one day God would send a successor to lead in his stead. In the 18th Chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses quotes the LORD and tells the people what was revealed to him, saying, "I [God] will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

Jesus is that great Prophet of whom Moses spake. He is the one sent from God the Father to give not only divine revelation but divine life unto man. Jesus is the very Word of the Father, and as we discussed last Sunday, He is the one who reveals to us the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

By including Moses in the first two Gospel lessons of Trinity Season, the lectionary seeks to draw our attention to the one who is greater than Moses. The lectionary seeks to help us listen to not only Moses and the prophets, but to that great prophet, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Here are some parallels between Moses and Jesus that are important for us to have in mind at the start of this Trinity Season.

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Moses went up the mountain to commune with God. Jesus, the Son of God, descends from heaven to commune with men.

Moses led the people of God out of bondage to Egypt. Jesus led all men out of bondage to death.

Moses proclaimed the coming of the Prophet whose mouth would be filled with the revelation of the LORD. Jesus is that Prophet...the very Word of God Himself.

There are many more parallels that could be listed, but let us conclude our meditation with just one more. This final parallel is the nail upon which these two Gospels hang at the start of this Trinity Season: Just as Moses revealed the Name of God to the people of Israel. Jesus has revealed the three persons of the Godhead, Himself being the Eternal Son of the Father.

Under Moses, the people of God learned that God is One: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD...*"

Under Jesus, the people of God learned that the same God who is One is also Three: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three Persons, one God.^{[L]_{SEP}}

May we with Nicodemus be both challenged and humbled by our Lord, who reminds us that if we cannot yet believe the earthly things that have been revealed to us, what makes us think that we will be able to believe heavenly revelations? And may we with the Rich Man from today's parable heed the warning of Abraham, that we have been given Moses and the Prophets so that we may first come to believe that God is one. For as C.B. Moss puts it, "The Hebrews had to be thoroughly taught that God is One, before they could go on to the further truth that He is Three." Today, if you struggle to understand how it is that God is three person and one divine essence, do not be discouraged. Instead, go to our Triune God in prayer and ask Him to help you believe heavenly things. We can trust the witness of the Son of God. We can trust that Prophet who is greater than Moses, the great I AM, who was before our father Abraham, is now, and ever shall be.

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