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ARCHIVES

# The Sermon and the Propers

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[EDITORIAL NOTE: This is the third and last installment of a series of articles from a larger manuscript on *The Sermon and the Propers* which the author is preparing for publication in book form. The two previous articles appeared in this journal in November and December 1956.]

## THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

January 6

THIS festival is known also as the Theophany, the Manifestation of God; the Feast of the Three Kings; and Twelfth — or in Lutheran Sweden, as Thirteenth — Day. A large section of the church still observes it as the Christmas Festival. In a degree it must be associated with Christmas, but there is a distinct advance in its teaching. The Babe of Bethlehem is revealed as God, the splendor of the divine glory bursting through the humanity. The feast is the complete fulfillment of Advent, the highest point of the Christmas cycle.

*The Introit.* "Behold, the Lord, the Ruler, hath come; and the kingdom, and the power, and the glory are in His hand. Give the King Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the King's Son."

The psalm is the seventy-second, whose first verse is translated in the RSV: "Give the King Thy justice, O God, and Thy righteousness to the royal Son." It seems probable that the Antiphon is either apocryphal or a liturgical composition, possibly in allusion to Mal. 3:1, imitating the doxology of the Lord's Prayer. The coming and adoration of the Magi is the great thought for the day, and the Introit announces that when they found the Child, they found the Lord, the Ruler, the royal Son, the just and righteous King. No new truth will be presented but rather the whole truth. The Babe belongs not to a single race or nation, but it is the whole world's Babe, the King and Savior of all mankind.

*The Collect.* "O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same," etc.

This is a fine example of the Collect form and of a natural and beautiful harmony with the Lessons. Unfortunately the translation

fails to bring out the fine antithesis between faith and sight which the original contains. Also lost in the English rendering is the thought of the original: The Magi were led, "grant that we may be led on till we come to gaze upon the beauty of Thy majesty." Note that, like all festival Collects, this prayer recites the event commemorated. It makes the ground of our petition a recitation of the historic event. The believer now knows God, not through the manifestation of the Son to which he was led by a star but through the revelation of the love that gave its all on the cross.

*The Epistle*, Is. 60:1-6. To the Antiphon of the Introit the Epistle replies: "Arise, shine; for your Light has come, and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you." It points to the approaching caravan of the Magi drawing near to Jerusalem. The prophet gives us a vision of the Messianic kingdom. While all the world is in darkness, the city of God is bathed in light, for the King has come. The Gentiles stream to the Light, henceforth to walk in its brightness. This Epistle offers opportunity to preach a sermon on missions without disrupting the progressive scheme of the church year, as would a special day for missions at some other time.

*The Gradual*. "All they from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord. Arise, and shine, O Jerusalem, for the Glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. Alleluia! Alleluia! We have seen His star in the East, and we have come with gifts to worship the Lord. Alleluia!"

This Gradual forms the connecting link between the reading of the Epistle and the reading of the holy Gospel. The first verse connects with the Epistle and concludes it. The second contains both elements, the Glory of the Lord has risen upon Jerusalem, and Jerusalem is to arise and shine. The third verse leads directly into the holy Gospel, which is about to be read: "We have seen His star, we have come with our gifts."

*The Proper Sentence*. "Alleluia! Oh, praise the Lord, all ye nations, and laud Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Alleluia!"

*The Gospel*, Matt. 2:1-12. The Lord, the Ruler, has come. He is here! The Magi search for Him, and though they find only the

young Child, they fall down and worship Him. Mark the contrast. His own people received Him not. The expectant Israel knew who was meant when the Magi inquired. They knew where He was to be found. But they did not go to Bethlehem. There was no Epiphany, no Manifestation, to them. But Gentiles came to the Light, and kings to the brightness of His rising.

*The Proper Preface.* "And now do we praise Thee that Thou didst send unto us Thine only-begotten Son and that in Him, being found in fashion as a man, Thou didst reveal the fullness of Thy glory."

#### OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE EPISTLE

*"Arise, Shine, for Your Light Has Come!"*

A. At Isaiah's time darkness covered the earth. Wicked Ahaz was on the throne of Judah (Is. 1:8). Outside Israel the world was steeped in paganism, abominable sins and vices. Mighty nations swept over the prostrate body of Judah in a bloody struggle for world supremacy. Isaiah looked forward to the time when the Christ was to appear. This, too, was an age without light. Only a few accepted the Christ Child. Similar conditions prevail in our own time. The Light has shined for 1,900 years, yet there are hundreds of millions in darkness, heathen, Mohammedans, Jews, despisers in so-called Christian lands. The church is divided, false prophets proclaim untruth, error has darkened the light. Men are groping for a way out of misery and death.

B. What does Isaiah mean with "light"? The entire text is a vision of the future. The light was to illumine the whole world. Therefore it could not be an earthly light. The light is Christ (John 1:4, 5, 9; 8:12; Luke 2:30-32). He comes in His Word, and the world is illumined by His Gospel (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Peter 1:19). Salvation was to be preached in every language, and the light of the holy Gospel was to dispel the night of heathenism and shine in Christendom. There was to be a people who walked in this light.

C. What does Isaiah mean when he says: "Arise, shine"? The text is addressed first to the Jewish community. Israel was to appropriate the offered salvation in repentance and faith. God's people were to place the light on a candlestick that it might shine in many

lands, might be like a city set upon a hill, visible to all, and so attract many nations. From Israel, from Jerusalem, the light of salvation was to come to the heathen. The apostles filled the earth with their preaching. By their blessed efforts the light shone also into the wilds of Europe and finally into this land and upon us. That we today are not walking in darkness but have the light of life is due to the fact that the early church so faithfully followed Isaiah's admonition and that our ancestors in turn sent out the light when they had come to it. Isaiah's call is also to the men of our day. In the believer there is still darkness, unbelief, doubt, timidity, fear, sin. Permit the Savior, the heavenly Light, to lighten your heart constantly through His Gospel, so that the reflection of the Light may break forth in godliness and in love for your fellow men! Be a light in your surroundings, in your home, in your church, for others. The call is to the entire church that she arise in old apostolic power and youthfulness. The twilight of the world has set in. The night is coming. Work feverishly while it is day that the light may reach all who are in darkness and that the earth may be filled with the knowledge and glory of God.

D. What should encourage us to heed Isaiah's call? He not merely admonishes, but to make us willing and eager he adds a most glorious promise (vv. 1:3-6). This sweet Christmas greeting is for every child of God. It has little meaning unless applied personally. The Savior will fill also your heart with the light of His grace and dispel the night of sin. The Light shines also for you, and God desires that you, too, see the glory of the Lord, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. This coming of the Light to us individually and personally is apt to disturb and disquiet us, cause uneasiness, especially when we come to meet our Lord at His Table. In His holy presence, face to face with the perfect love with which He loved us when He gave His body and shed His blood for us, we feel, as perhaps at no other time, that our conduct and even our love for Him leaves much to be desired. As we step into the presence of the Light, we discover much darkness in ourselves. This is nothing new. We felt that way the last time we communed, and the time before. Therefore we may be inclined to become discouraged over the slow progress in our spiritual development and life. It is well, there-

fore, that we attune our ears to the Lord's assurance: "Your Light has come, and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you." The divine Light is to shine also into our night of discouragement and disappointment. As He who is the Light gives Himself to us in the Holy Sacrament, may we hear echoing in our hearts the words of our God (Ps. 97:11): "You shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice" (v. 5), when you experience that the Lord is your Light and your Salvation. So we shall go back to our daily tasks, back into the world in which we must live, with renewed confidence and hope that our battle against personal sins and faults shall not be in vain. As we go back into our daily environment and the relationships of everyday life, there is much to disturb and sadden us. Walking in the light, we see and notice that so many still walk in darkness. The Light has come, but they continue in night. Perhaps a close relative or associate is walking blindly in the way of unbelief toward certain destruction. We have admonished and pleaded, wept and prayed, but all seems to be in vain. We are haunted by the thought of how it must end, and the thought fills us with terror. Into this darkness comes the call, "Arise, shine!" The light of faith and hope must not fail. Yours, too, is the promise. The hour of triumph shall come also for you. With this promise ringing in our ears we leave this holy place with new hope and strength and with the firm resolution to continue our prayers and efforts for the souls of men. But our concern is not restricted to the circle of our immediate relatives and acquaintances. The text speaks of nations and kings, of sons and daughters from afar, etc. All these shall come to our light. Our light must shine into far countries. There is so much to be done at home that it seems we can do little in the face of hundreds of millions and whole continents in darkness. The text encourages not to grow weary. We shall never catch all the souls for which we cast out the net, but we shall catch every soul which God intends for us as the fruit of our efforts. God is fulfilling His promise even now. There is a steady forward march of God's cause. Viewed in the light of our feeble, halfhearted efforts, God's blessings are truly amazing. Forward, then, cheerfully and confidently! Proclaim the Lord's death until He comes! The time is approaching when we shall see and be radiant with joy, when our hearts shall thrill and rejoice.

## SERMON ON THE HOLY GOSPEL

The Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord was originally what the Feast of the Holy Nativity is for us today. It was the starting point of the story of redemption. The Eastern Church did not emphasize the birth and boyhood history of our Lord but considered His Baptism the beginning. "Epiphany" means revelation, manifestation. At His Baptism our Lord was first unveiled as the Redeemer. God the Father declared on this occasion: "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The Holy Spirit descended on the Carpenter of Nazareth and anointed the human Christ for His office as Prophet, Priest, and King. Assured by the Father that He was indeed the divine Son and equipped for the work of redemption by the power of the Holy Spirit, our Lord entered upon His public ministry.

When the Feast of the Epiphany found its way into the Western Church, the Christians of the West were already observing the Nativity as the beginning of Christ's work. So they adapted the Epiphany to fit into the Western scheme. What they celebrated on December 25 happened among Israelites. The people who received the Babe as the long-expected Messiah were Jews—Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and many others as time went on. The Western Church was composed largely of Gentiles. So the Epiphany was designated as the Christmas of the Gentiles, to celebrate and emphasize that Christ came not only for the Jews but for all people. The story of the Kings from the East was chosen as the first manifestation of Christ as the Savior also of the non-Jews, and the coming of the Magi to their King was made the center of the day.

How thorough the Western Church was in its adaptation may be seen from the Propers of the day. The theme of the day, as always, is announced in the Introit. "Behold, the Lord, the Ruler hath come; and the kingdom and the power and the glory are in His hand." These words announce that the Babe born in Bethlehem is now to be revealed as "God of God, Very God of Very God," and manifested in all the divine glory. The Epistle is from the Old Testament. It brings a prophecy of the coming of the Gentiles that is now fulfilled. "Arise, shine; for your Light has come, and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Nations shall

come to your Light and kings to the brightness of your rising." It is an answer to the Introit and points to the approaching caravan of the Magi as they draw near to Jerusalem. The Gradual deserves special notice. "All they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord." In this first verse from the prophet Isaiah they are still to come. We have here the connection with the prophecy of the Epistle. In the second verse the King has come. "Arise, and shine, O Jerusalem; for the Glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." The third verse leads directly into the holy Gospel now to be read: "We have seen His star in the East; and we have come with our gifts to worship the Lord." In the Collect we have already prayed: "O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles. . . ." In the holy Gospel the Gentiles come. "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship Him."

In all likelihood this happened at least six weeks after the Nativity, for we are told that His parents took the Christ Child to Jerusalem for presentation in the temple forty days after His birth. It is not likely that Joseph would have taken Him there after the warning the Magi received by the angel. Besides, we read that Joseph rose and took the Child and His mother by night and departed to Egypt. How many Magi came from the East to worship the newborn King we are not told.

They came to worship the Lord Jesus. These Gentiles knew He was King of the Jews, promised to, and expected by, the Jews, the Comforter and Helper of Israel. Yet they searched for Him and worshiped Him just as though He were also their King. They saw in Him their Lord and King, whose kingdom extended beyond the boundaries of Israel, in whom also the Gentiles were to believe and obtain salvation.

How did they come to appropriate to themselves the Savior of Israel? They said: "We have seen His star in the East." Later we read that they were warned of God in a dream not to return to Herod. We must look for the hand of God in this story. God was with these people. God, who had given the Jews the revelation



concerning the Savior, also gave the Gentiles such a revelation. To Nazareth and Bethlehem He sent a message by an angel, to the Gentiles in the East He sent a message by a star.

These Gentiles doubtless had previous knowledge of the promise and hope of Israel. Balaam, the prophet who spoke of the star that should rise out of Jacob and of the scepter from Judah, had lived in the East. Daniel had spent most of his life there. The Jewish nation was captive in Babylon for seventy years. It requires no stretch of the imagination to believe that these Magi looked in faith for the promised star and the scepter from Judah and that the star God hung in the heavens was the messenger proclaiming to them that the Promised One was born.

In announcing the birth of the Savior in the East, God showed that Jesus Christ had come not only for the Jews but for all people. He declared that faith in Jesus Christ is the religion He has meant for the whole world. According to God's will, no other religion is to exist. Yet after two thousand years there are almost countless religions in the world. As a result, much unhappiness and suffering has come upon men. Some of the bloodiest wars of history were fought on religious grounds. Religious fanatics caused men to persecute each other cruelly. Wise men and great minds have occupied themselves with the problem of doing away with this evil and having all men accept one and the same religion. We continue to hear and read much of attempts to unite all men on common religious grounds. The essential teachings of the Christian, Jewish, Mohammedan, Hindu, Chinese religions are to be combined and a world religion made to which all men can subscribe. All nations are to be united as children of God.

All pronouncements regarding a world religion sound very beautiful and hopeful. But for men to create a world religion is a foolish and vain undertaking. It is foolish because religion must be based on truth. Truth is the first essential, and the truth about God and His relation to man is hidden from the natural heart. All the philosophers of the world will never discover the truth. To be true, a religion must be revealed to men by God Himself. The undertaking to create a world religion is also vain, because it is unnecessary. It is unnecessary to discover a religion in order to help a world floundering in error and darkness. For the true

world religion that is to unite all peoples and make all men happy is already here. We have it. It is the religion of faith in Jesus Christ. This God declared when He called the Magi from the East to worship the King of the Jews.

Nor was this the only time God declared this. It was so from the beginning. There was a time when God had the whole human race before Him. On this occasion He taught this religion of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man. It was in the garden of Eden, when He spoke to Adam and Eve of the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head. Here God directed Adam and Eve and all their descendants to Christ. Faith in Him was to be their religion.

Through all the history of man, God never recognized any other religion. On the contrary, He always condemned every other religion. In His eyes the greatest offense always has been that men ignored and perverted whatever knowledge they had of God and did not accept the one religion. In His displeasure over the rejection of revealed truth He punished men by letting them suffer the consequences of their perversion. St. Paul declares that when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God neither were thankful, and they changed the truth of God into a lie. For this reason God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not fitting. He darkened their minds. The rejection of the true religion always has serious consequences.

Through His prophets God again and again proclaimed that He would not permit the Gentiles to continue forever in the false, man-made religion. In the fullness of the time a mighty call should go forth to all nations that they forsake their own ways and come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the God whom He revealed. When God came to earth to reveal Himself in Christ, this event was announced to the Gentiles by a star. Before withdrawing His visible presence again, the God-man gave His followers the command to make disciples of all nations. He said of Himself: "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me." His apostles declared: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Referring to the time when the Gentiles did not know the truth as revealed in Christ, the apostle

said: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead."

That faith in Jesus Christ is the world religion has been borne out also by the history of this religion. At the time of Noah, after the Flood, there was no other religion in the world. But soon men forsook the true religion. Then God chose Abraham and his children as its guardians. There were believers outside Israel, but the Jews had and kept the truth. Then came the time of the New Testament and of bringing the glad news to all the world. At once it became apparent that this true religion, preserved in Israel through the centuries, was adapted to all nations, for it applied itself to a condition common to all. All men were sinners, and this religion brought the cure for sin. Today there is hardly a nation on the globe among whom believers in Christ are not found. Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world is today the true world religion. Then it is the religion also for you and me. We, too, are truly religious and in any relation to our Creator only when we believe and trust in Jesus Christ. We, too, are to acknowledge Christ as our King and Lord.

If faith in Jesus Christ is the world religion, how is it that so many do not accept it? How is it that so many profess to be Christians yet give no evidence of faith in their lives? This is apt to disturb us. One would expect something far different from a religion with almighty God behind it. But the situation is as old as the religion itself. When the Magi came to Jerusalem to worship the King, nobody seemed glad or happy over the Savior. All the city was troubled, Herod was alarmed, nobody joined the Magi on the way to Bethlehem. But this did not deter them. They knew that men love darkness rather than light. The glad news had won their hearts. They put their trust in the Messiah of Israel and desired to be saved by Him. The unbelief of others could not shake their resolution to seek and find Him who alone brought hope to a perishing world.

The reason for so much unbelief has not changed since then. Herod feared for his throne. The people feared that the coming

of the Messiah at this time would mean unrest and disruption of business. Comfort, tranquillity, the enjoyment of material advantages was preferred to anything the Messiah could bring. It's the same today. The love of the material is still the real cause of much unbelief. A lack of interest, the fear of a change and upset in life, is the natural attitude of blind, sinful men. If we no longer prefer the material, if we are no longer indifferent to Christ, if a change has been brought about, this means that God has performed a miracle in us. We have been born a second time, and a new nature has been given us. The love of God has been poured into our hearts. When that love came into our hearts, the love of self and of the material went out and died. Now Jesus Christ is all.

His love in our hearts embraces all men. This love thinks not of self but only of others. The Love in our hearts is the Love that gave His life for all men. He loved all men, we love all men. We have in our possession the religion that alone will save. Not one for whom Christ died shall be lost if we can prevent it. All must hear the glad news from our lips. We have seen His star. We have found Him. We have come with the Magi to Bethlehem and have seen the true God. We must learn to know Him and worship Him only.

This is the divine solution for the problem of a world religion. As believers we shall set ourselves, not to bring a world religion into being but to bring the existent world religion into the hearts and lives of all men.

#### THE HOLY COMMUNION

How and by whom is the world to be brought to the knowledge of the true religion? Having finished the work of redemption, our Lord withdrew His visible presence from the earth and ascended to the right hand of God. But before He withdrew His visible body, He created for Himself another body in which He was to continue the work of bringing salvation to men everywhere. This body, of which He is the Head, is His church, the body of the faithful. St. Paul writes Eph.1:22,23: "He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the Head over all things for the church, which is His body." Again, 1 Cor.12:27: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." The Head over all things, under whose feet all things were put for the church,

which is His body, committed the evangelization of the world to His believers. "Go and make disciples of all nations" by baptizing and teaching. "And, lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." We who profess to love Him and for His sake love our fellow men are to function as members of the body in which He continues His presence on earth.

The members of His body, intimately united with Him, are not to carry out His will like slaves and servants. "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14, 15). Making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching is not a disagreeable task imposed by a master on unwilling servants. It is an arrangement between loving friends, a sharing in an undertaking that brought God to earth and cost Him His life, a partnership in the divine work of salvation.

Into this partnership with God and Christ we enter anew as we proclaim our Lord's death by eating His body and drinking His blood in the Holy Sacrament. We enter into communion with Christ. A communion is a partnership, a fellowship. To this partnership the Head of the body contributes all He has done for our redemption, His perfect life, His willing death, His glorious resurrection and ascension. As partners we, too, must make our contribution. We are to assume the obligation of bringing the glad news of Christ's salvation to the world.

As we, then, acknowledge our Lord as our Savior and King and enter anew into the partnership with Christ by believingly accepting the precious gifts our divine Partner has provided, we declare our eager willingness to function as members of Christ's body and to assume the obligation of making disciples of all nations.

#### THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

When studying the Propers of the Sundays in the Epiphany season, we must never lose sight of the fact that we have a series of manifestations presented to us. The Babe of Bethlehem is manifested as the Son of God. Whatever the practical application may be, the dominant note is always Manifestation. "Did you not know

that I must be in My Father's house (about My Father's business)?" "Manifested His glory." "I will; be clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." "And the servant was healed at that very moment." "Even winds and sea obey Him." "Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers." "He was transfigured before them. . . . This is My beloved Son." Always the human Christ's deity is manifested.

The Roman Church observes the First Sunday after the Epiphany as the Feast of the Holy Family. But the statement of the holy Gospel that our Lord was obedient to His parents, while important as to the extent of the duty assumed by Him, is not the dominant thought of the day in the light of the Propers. The holy Gospel presents a striking Epiphany of duty in every relation of life. But the intended purpose is to show us that the Youth, after listening to the doctors and asking questions for three days, clearly realized who He was and willingly assumed the duties imposed by God on the Savior from sin.

*The Introit.* "I saw also the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. And I heard the voice of a great multitude, saying, Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness."

The Introits for the first three Sundays have a certain general resemblance, striking the dominant note of Epiphany. This day's Introit holds the key to the purpose of the day's worship. It describes the prophet Isaiah's theophany (6:1). The Lord Omnipotent sitting on a throne, the heavenly multitude singing its Alleluia. Against the background of the heavenly vision the church points to the Lad seated in the midst of the doctors. Adoringly she worships Him as Lord of lords and King of kings. In the holy Gospel Christ is revealed for us, and in the Epistle He is revealed in us and by us.

*The Collect.* "O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people, who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same."

We pray for an Epiphany of knowledge and power. We need knowledge that we may perceive what we ought to do with regard to our spiritual interests, our duty in the conduct of ordinary life.

But we also need the power to perform our duty, willingly, thoroughly, accurately, and without hesitation. The source of this power is grace. God is not only our Teacher as to our duty but also our Helper in our duty.

*The Epistle*, Rom. 12:1-5. Here the apostle carries the spirit of the Lad's wholehearted consecration of Himself over into our lives. The Epistle beseeches us by the mercies of God to present our bodies a living sacrifice. The Introit has already called upon us, "Serve the Lord with gladness." The holy Gospel sets before us the example of our Lord. This example we are to follow and ourselves to be manifestations of Christ in daily life and conduct.

*The Gradual*. "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things, and blessed be His glorious name forever. The mountains shall bring peace to Thy people, and the hills righteousness. Alleluia! Alleluia! Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands, serve the Lord with gladness. Alleluia!"

*The Proper Sentence*. "Alleluia! Oh, praise the Lord, all ye nations, and laud Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Alleluia!"

*The Gospel*, Luke 2:41-52. We have here the one and only record of our Lord's life between His infancy and the beginning of His ministry. It is singled out as a striking epiphany of duty in every relation of life.

*The Proper Preface*. "And now do we praise Thee that Thou didst send us Thine only-begotten Son and that in Him, being found in fashion as a man, Thou didst reveal the fullness of Thy glory."

#### OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE EPISTLE

##### "Precepts of Duty"

A. *The Motive of Duty*. Duty, even the plainest, is to be done from the highest motive, the sense of "the mercies of God." We are to act from the motive of love, not of our love which is so weak but of God's great love toward us. Duty is not a price to purchase love, but a thankoffering for love received; not a thing of dreary necessity, but of gladness, its only sorrow being its own imperfection.

B. *The Sacrifice of Duty.* Duty is a sacrifice, the sacrifice of the living will, the consecration of the life to holiness and of the body and all the powers to service. Such a sacrifice God will accept. Indeed, He expects it, for it is our "reasonable service" ("spiritual worship" RSV), and no arbitrary demand. We cannot do less for Him who has done so much for us.

C. *The Freedom of Duty.* Duty has been defined as sacrifice, and it is that during this present life. Men try to escape sacrifice by conforming to the world around them. The Christian has a better way of escape from the pain of sacrifice — by being inwardly transformed into likeness to the will of God. The old nature shrinks from sacrifice, the new nature finds the yoke easy and the burden light, discerning that the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect. A ready will makes the sacrifice easy, in fact, no sacrifice at all; for when we have so chosen His will that it becomes ours, the bitterness of sacrifice is past. We are face to face with the strange paradox that the greater the sacrifice, the greater the freedom.

D. *The Humility of Duty.* If duty to God demands sacrifice, duty to men demands humility. It is easier to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. Duty to others is, however, duty to God, and arises from our common membership in Christ's church. In Christ's mystical body none counts for more than one, and none for less. Every man is to be himself and do his own work, even if he thinks that his sphere might be more important. We are not to be above our work if it seems mean, nor to despise the work of others if ours seems more important. All duty done to others is duty done to Christ, and our highest dignity is to have done our best. Not what is to be done, but how it is done, makes the difference between one and another.

#### OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE HOLY GOSPEL

##### *"The Example of Duty"*

A. *The Home in Nazareth.* It was the scene of conscientious duty to God and His church. The parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. They rejoiced that "the boy Jesus" was now of age to take His journey with them and appear before God in Zion. Evidently it had been a home of religious education,



of careful holy teaching, of eager questions and understanding answers. The boy Jesus had been well taught, and long before He sat in the midst of the doctors, He must have learned at Mary's knee.

B. *Duty Toward the Things of God.* It matters little whether we translate "My Father's business" or "My Father's house." Either rendering displays early devotion to the things of God and a genuine consciousness of divine Sonship and of a divine mission. These first recorded words of Christ have been often compared with His words from the cross "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." From birth to death our Lord manifested the Father. This was His own summary of His life, and it could not be more complete.

C. *Duty to His Parents.* This devotion to His heavenly Father was not inconsistent with His duty to His earthly parents, for He "came to Nazareth and was obedient to them." This applies not only to His actual childhood but also to His whole Nazareth life. Child, boy, and man, He submitted His will, time, and toil, becoming a carpenter before He became the Savior of the world. This is the consecration of all labor, and especially of labor on behalf of parents.

D. *Duty of Preparation.* "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature." He spent thirty years in private to prepare for three years in public. The best preparation for the future is the present. He did not despise the secluded village of Nazareth. Great is the value of quiet seasons, great the sacredness of home, great the sweetness of village life. In themselves, and to the Christian, all these are consecrated by Christ's voluntary choice during the first thirty years of His earthly sojourn. We may even learn the needed lesson that it is quite possible to be good even in a bad village, and that our surroundings are often part of our discipline.

#### THE HOLY COMMUNION

The holy Gospel presents an epiphany of duty in every relation of life and shows us how our Lord willingly assumed the duties imposed on Him as the Savior from sin. The Epistle calls on us to follow His example of wholehearted consecration and to be, in

our lives, manifestations of Christ. It is most appropriate that we celebrate Holy Communion this day and act upon our Lord's plea to do it in remembrance of Him. When He instituted His Supper in the night of His betrayal, the failure or success of God's plan of salvation depended, humanly speaking, upon the friends He had gathered about Him in this last night. Would they give themselves completely to His cause? He must make sure of their unselfish, unwavering devotion to the task of bringing the knowledge of Him and His salvation to all the world. So He took bread, gave it to them, and said: "This is My body, broken for you." He gave them wine, and said: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." His plea was: "Do this in remembrance of Me; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Let it remind you to remember Me, to think of Me, of My love for you that prompted Me to give My body and shed My blood for you on the cross. Let it remind you of My work and My person, of all about Me, also of My wholehearted devotion and consecration to the things of God.

The loving Savior meets us at His Table and gives us the seal of our forgiveness and salvation. We make the price He paid our very own. Our sin no longer stands as a barrier between us and our God. We are dear children of a loving, heavenly Father. We are brothers and sisters of the Son of God and co-heirs of the Kingdom. Our Communion is also a confession on our part. St. Paul says we proclaim the Lord's death. We declare that we would be hopelessly lost if Christ had not given His body and shed His blood for our salvation. We confess that we believe in our personal forgiveness by His atoning death. We also declare that we are men and women whom the Lord purchased with the price of His body and blood to be His own, that we are people upon whom the Lord depends for the salvation of the world.

We are so apt to forget our high calling and blessed responsibility. So the Lord calls us to His Table and says: "Do this in remembrance of Me, your Savior and Redeemer. This is to remind you not to forget that you belong to Me. I have bought you with a price. You belong not to yourself, not to the world. You are My bloodbought property. By every bond of honesty and fairness you are bound to serve Me." He said to His followers: "As the

Father has sent Me, even so I send you." He insists that His work on earth is as much ours as the Father's work was His. Therefore He expects of His followers the same devotion to the Father's business that characterized His whole life. When we celebrate Holy Communion in remembrance of our Lord, we are to be reminded also of His wholehearted devotion to the Father's business.

Remember how fully and completely He gave Himself to the work for which He was sent. He said: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work." His very existence was to do that for which His Father had sent Him into the world. He said: "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me." Again: "I must work the works of Him who sent Me." At the end of His life He could say: "I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."

We need to be reminded that our Lord expects of all His followers this same devotion to the Father's work. As He gave His life, so we are to dedicate our time and strength and abilities, yes, our very life, to the advancement of God's cause. We are so apt to forget the real purpose of our existence, to consider the making of a living the object of our lives instead of merely a means to the end of serving the Lord. So it happens that people waste their lives on trivialities and fail to accomplish the lofty purpose of their existence.

As you come today and joyously confess your happy conviction that the Lord Jesus has purchased you with His body and blood to serve Him, ask yourself what you are doing for Him. There is something for you to do. There is a task waiting. It is for you to find the place for which the Lord intended and prepared you, and if you search for it earnestly and honestly, He will lead you into it. You have some gift which you are to employ in the Lord's service. Your Redeemer would not expect definite service of you if there were nothing you could do. St. Paul says: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." In this day's Epistle he writes: "As in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members

one of another." We are one body in Christ, and we are Christ's body. Any body that has inactive, useless, dead members is crippled and deformed. The Lord's body is not so. As we, then, eat and drink in remembrance of our Lord, whose body and blood we receive here together with the bread and wine, may we be reminded not to forget His love and His devotion to God's cause.

#### THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Today we see another ray of Epiphany light manifested in Cana and to be reflected in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The grace revealed in the holy Gospel and to be manifested in our lives according to the Epistle is evidently the grace of sympathy. The general dominant note of the Epiphany is present in the Introit and the Gradual, the note of joy. The chief thought is brought by the holy Gospel, in which by His presence and by His first miracle our Lord manifests divine sympathy. That the occasion was a wedding is no reason for ignoring the church's purpose by preaching on the subject of marriage. Our Lord is the center, God manifest in the flesh. The Epistle speaks of love, mercy, kindly affection as the imitation by us and the reflection in us of a quality manifested by the God-man. The Gradual also pictures divine sympathy. God healed us. Praise Him for His goodness.

*The Introit.* "All the earth shall worship Thee and shall sing unto Thee, O God. They shall sing to Thy name, O Thou Most High. Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands, sing forth the honor of His name, make His praise glorious."

Again we have the dominant note of the Epiphany — joy. All creation is to join in singing to the name of the Most High.

*The Collect.* "Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people, and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life."

At first glance this prayer may seem out of harmony with the thought of the day, which is our Lord's manifestation of divine sympathy. Yet a prayer for continual peace all the days of our life can be made to harmonize. For peace we need the assurance of divine power extending over "all things in heaven and earth" and of divine mercy and sympathy accepting our petitions. This

union of love and power is the great teaching of the miracle of Cana, in which our Lord made use of God's power to relieve anxiety and to grant peace. His sympathy is united with infinite power. His power may be trusted, for it is united with infinite sympathy.

*The Epistle*, Rom. 12:6-16. The glory of the Lord must be reflected in those who believe in Him, reflected in devoted relation to those in the community. Prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, contributing, giving aid, merciful acts, all these are gifts. They are to be used as gifts, with diligence, faithfulness, simplicity, cheerfulness. The gifts are of God. The Christian recognizes his responsibility and, strengthened by God's grace, manifests his Master's glory by the good use of them. Love, kindness, fervor, patience, constancy in prayer, generosity, unity, humility, these are marks of the true followers of the Master. Living them is living Him. "Sing forth the honor of His name, make His praise glorious!"

*The Gradual*. "The Lord sent His Word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men. Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise ye Him, all His angels; praise ye Him, all His hosts. Alleluia!"

The Savior is here! God sent Christ and delivered us from destruction. For this all the children of men and all the hosts of angels are to praise Him. The Word became flesh because He was moved by the same sympathy and pity which prompted the miracle of Cana.

*The Proper Sentence*. "Alleluia! Oh, praise the Lord, all ye nations, and laud Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Alleluia!"

*The Gospel*, John 2:1-11. The reason for appointing this Gospel is: "This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." Last Sunday we had the Epiphany of the first word, today the Epiphany of the first sign, a manifestation of His glory and a cause of faith in Him. The miracle of Cana is here to be considered as an Epiphany of sympathy.

*The Proper Preface*. "And now do we praise Thee that Thou

didst send unto us Thine only-begotten Son and that in Him, being found in fashion as a man, Thou didst reveal the fullness of Thy glory.”

#### OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE EPISTLE

##### *Christian Sympathy*

A. *Sympathy and Duty.* St. Paul passes naturally from duty to sympathy, for the Epistle for today follows directly that for last Sunday. The same divine obligation which binds to duty binds also to sympathy. We are all to labor and to love because we are members one of another.

B. *The Brotherhood of Duty.* Christian brotherhood is the foundation of Christian duty. Christianity treats all believers as brothers, all “having gifts that differ according to the grace given us.” Each Christian must contribute his special gift to the good of all. The prophet or preacher is not to preach an isolated Gospel of pet truths, which he brings forward to the exclusion of others. The minister is to give himself wholly to his flock, the teacher to his class, the mission preacher to his evangelizing. Charity, authority, mercy, must not be administered perfunctorily. Our first duty to others is to do our own work well.

C. *The Brotherhood of Sympathy.* Inflexible in principle and careful of our own spiritual life, we are to be no less careful of the needs of others. “Contribute to the needs of the saints.” The rich Christian has a direct responsibility for his poor fellow Christian. Such sympathy is not a matter of sentiment but of duty. “Practice hospitality.” We should welcome fellow Christians, not only to our church and to our hearts but to our homes. “Bless, and do not curse them.” Go beyond the friendship which loves where it is loved, by blessing your persecutors. Christian sympathy must “rejoice with those who rejoice,” as did our Lord at Cana, and “weep with those who weep,” as He did at Bethany. Rise to absolute identity of feeling, “live in harmony with one another.” To conquer prejudice, which so contracts the affections, “associate with the lowly.” This brotherhood of duty and sympathy is to be found in the Church of Christ. Christians have the bounden duty to recognize that want of courtesy and indifference to the feelings of others, to say nothing of positive readiness to give pain, are an open denial of Christ.

## OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE HOLY GOSPEL

*The Sympathy of Christ*

A. *Duty and Sympathy.* Duty did not fill our Lord's life in such a way as to leave no room for sympathy. Surely no life was ever so spent in duty. He had just entered upon His campaign of redemption and was in the very act of choosing His captains in the fight. Yet He did not plead duty as an excuse but came to the wedding with His disciples. If He did not plead urgency, how much less may people whose lives are filled with pleasure and selfishness.

B. *Sympathy with Human Relationships.* One object with Christ that day was to proclaim Himself divine. Another was to proclaim that the great purpose of His coming was His will to sanctify all that is human. He came not to destroy human nature and relations, but to fulfill them by reconnecting them with God. Christ came to unite, not to scatter. Our fault is not that we love too much, but that we love too little. We shall not love home less by loving Christ more.

C. *Sympathy with Human Joys.* Our chief joys and sorrows center in our homes, and as at Bethany Christ relieved the deepest sorrows of a home, so at Cana He showed His sympathy with the joys and lesser anxieties of home. He was manifested as the Friend of human happiness. The fault is not that we are happy, but that we are not happy enough. Earth's sources of pleasure run dry, and at Cana Christ was manifested as the Source of a joy that is richer. The poor flat wine of earthly joy is soon spent in the cask; so Christ came to give a joy that no man can take from us. They who seek Christ at Golgotha shall find Him, and they who seek Him at Cana shall find Him there also.

D. *Sympathy with Human Feelings.* We see in Christ the very essence of sympathy, which is not merely to feel with others but also to enter into their feelings. His bounty was bestowed so secretly that none but the servants knew how near the little supply had been to failure, or how it had been replenished. Christ's gifts of grace are given and best received secretly.

E. *The Final Victory of Sympathy.* What was done at Cana is a type of all Christ's working and of the final banishment of

sorrows, when God shall wipe away all tears and when the water of sorrow shall be turned into the wine of joy at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Till that consummation our duty is obedience, unquestioning, impartial, practical, personal, and its motto: "Do whatever He tells you." We cannot share the Christian hope and comfort without rendering Christian obedience.

### THE HOLY COMMUNION

In a modern congregation, circumstances require the frequent reminder that all we are brethren, members of one body, who are to serve one another in love with whatever gifts we have received. The Holy Communion serves as such a reminder. The apostle Paul writes 1 Cor. 10:17: "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf." At the Lord's Table we all partake of the same bread, eat a fragment broken from the same loaf. Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body. In the twelfth chapter he describes the sympathy and loving concern the various members of the same body feel and show for one another. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." Into this relation with one another we enter anew as we eat of the same loaf at the Lord's Table.

We eat and drink in remembrance of Him. He gives us His body which He gave into death out of love for us. He gives us His blood which He shed for love of us. This reminds us of His love and keeps alive in us a deep affection for Him. But when He asked that we do this to remember Him, He was concerned, not only about our love for Him but also about His followers' love for one another. Their strength lay in their united affection, their oneness. His kingdom was founded on truth and love. By love it was to conquer the kingdoms of this world. Not only love for Him but also love for one another was essential. He wanted to make sure that they wholeheartedly loved one another. What would hold them together in love? Their love for Him! If all loved Him, they must love one another. This love must keep them united. So He pleads with us to love Him always, because He wants us to love the other brethren who love Him.

Hidden behind these two desires was a third. He wants to be



remembered and loved always, because He wants His friends to love and serve all needy men always. Unselfish, self-denying, humble service to our fellow men is to be our life, as it was His. It is a hard thing to expect of us. It is impossible unless we constantly keep true to our ideal of service by means of a lasting affection for Him. So He pleads: "Do this in remembrance of Me." Recall not only My person but everything about Me. Remember how no service was too humble and lowly. Remember this, follow My example, and do it for Me. Reproduce Me in your lives. Pattern after Me.

As we celebrate the Holy Communion this morning, may we not forget for a moment that we are doing it in remembrance of Him. There is probably little danger of our failing to recall that He gave His life to purchase for us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The words "for you" will assure us that, in making the price paid for our forgiveness our own by eating and drinking, we have all that Christ purchased with that price. All His is ours, His righteousness, His perfection, His holiness, His glory. We should be strange people, indeed, if we could kneel again in spirit under the cross and see the Son of God dying out of love for us, without loving Him too. If our Communion is not a mechanical thing, we shall remember Him and love Him the more as we recall His sacred person and glorious work of love.

But to do this in remembrance of Him means more. We are to remember Him also in His eagerness to find some means of keeping His followers united in their common affection for their Lord. As they remember Him, every disturbing element in their fellowship and in their love for one another is to disappear. The love we have for Him is to unite us. "Love one another even as I have loved you," is His call to us this morning. If we love Him, we will wish to please Him.

#### THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

The chief thought of the day is that our Lord manifested divine mercy by performing the two miracles recorded in the holy Gospel. Our Lord came down from the mountain to meet the anguishing hearts of men, the miseries of life, the stern realities faced by sin-possessed, diseased humanity. We recall what we heard on the

Third Sunday in Advent. "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." He is the Promised One who should come, for He shows divine mercy by cleansing the leper and healing the paralytic servant. The leper is a Jew. To him our Lord says, "I will." The centurion and his servant are Gentiles. To them, "I will come and heal him." We pray in the Collect: "Mercifully look upon our infirmities . . . stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty." The key word this day is *mercy*.

*The Introit.* "Worship Him, all ye His angels. Zion heard and was glad. The daughters of Judah rejoiced because of Thy judgments, O Lord. The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof."

As last Sunday, there is no specific reference to the thought of the day, but only the general call to worship, in which all creation, Zion, the earth, the angels, and the isles of the sea are to join.

*The Collect.* "Almighty and Everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us."

This is a touching prayer for the divine mercy. We are made up of infirmities, dangers, necessities. Regard us as Thou didst the leper. Let our need come before Thee as did the appeal of the centurion. Let our dangers and necessities find the sympathy of Thy tender compassion. We plead for mercy.

*The Epistle,* Rom. 12:16-21. This is the concluding portion of the chapter which for three consecutive Sundays progressively teaches us Christ's Epiphany in the Christian. St. Paul shows plainly what is meant in the Collect by "infirmities," "dangers," "necessities," and how great is our need of God's right hand to help and defend us.

*The Gradual.* "The heathen shall fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth Thy glory. When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in His glory. Alleluia! Alleluia! The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Alleluia!"

*The Proper Sentence.* "Alleluia! Oh, praise the Lord all ye

nations, and laud Him, all ye people. For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Alleluia!"

*The Gospel*, Matt. 8:1-13. Christ has sympathy with human sorrows, but what of the many sorrows caused by sin? And what of the suffering that comes more or less directly as a consequence and penalty of a sin? The holy Gospel gives us the answer in presenting the Epiphany of mercy.

*The Proper Preface*. "And now do we praise Thee that Thou didst send unto us Thine only-begotten Son and that in Him, being found in fashion as a man, Thou didst reveal the fullness of Thy glory."

#### OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE EPISTLE

##### *Christian Mercy*

A. *The Beginning of Strife*. It should have no beginning, for once begin to repay evil for evil, and you know not where you will end. Since strife usually begins in misunderstanding, we are not to be haughty and conceited, for the mistake may prove to be ours. Should we be in the right, we must make it clear that we are in the right by taking thought for what is noble in the sight of all; otherwise it will be our fault that we have been misunderstood. At any rate, we are to do our best to live peaceably with all men, so far as it depends on us. We cannot answer for others, nor prevent a quarrel, but we can make it very difficult.

B. *The Midst of Strife*. We are to give place to wrath, give our anger time to cool, or we are to yield to the anger of others rather than to be set on revenge. "Leave it to the wrath of God," RSV. The Christian is to stand aside and give God room to act. If He punish, man need not; if He refuse to punish, man may not.

C. *The End of Strife*. We are to labor for this ending and bide our time. Someday the one opposing us will have need of us. He will be hungry or thirsty, and we can heap burning coals upon his head by treating him better than he expects. In Ps. 18:12 "coals of fire" are symbols of divine vengeance and a poetic description of lightning. The original meaning seems to have been lost. Prov. 25:21, 22: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals

of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you." At any rate, let the lightnings of our anger be sheet lightning, not forked, the summer lightning of gentleness. To overcome evil with good is indeed a victory, for we conquer not our enemy but his enmity. Bacon: "By revenge we are even with our enemy; by mercy we are superior." By mercy we may not only win others to ourselves, but, still better, win them to God.

#### OUTLINE FOR SERMON ON THE HOLY GOSPEL

##### *The Mercy of Christ*

A. *An Epiphany of Mercy to the Leper.* (1) The Leper's Misery. A sufferer from another disease could look for compassion. Not so the leper. He was shut out from human companionship. Leprosy was communicable, loathsome to the view, spreading and growing until at last it resulted in the dissolution of the whole body. The father of the epileptic boy said, "If you can do anything." The leper was certain of Christ's power. (2) The Epiphany of Mercy. Christ's heart was moved by compassion. His tongue uttered words of encouragement. His hand did not shrink from healing contact. This is an Epiphany of the mercy that endures forever. Christ will never restrain His mercy in disgust and displeasure at the corruption of those who acknowledge their vileness and truly repent of their faults. (3) The Right Use of Mercy. We misconceive mercy if we imagine that to receive mercy is to be absolved from duty. The leper must still show himself to the priests, the health officers, and offer the customary gift. The object of mercy is to save us, not from the trouble of doing right but from the trouble of doing wrong. Mercy is to be the motive of obedience, for Christ did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it; not to save us in our sins but from our sins; not to make sin safe but to make us safe from sin.

B. *An Epiphany of Mercy to the Paralyzed.* The diseases of the human body have their counterpart in the fallen human spirit. Sin is leprosy in its corruption, and paralysis is its paralyzing weakness. From this also the mercy of Christ is ready to deliver us. From the example of the centurion we may learn how mercy should be sought and how it may be obtained. It is given (1) to the merciful. These obtain mercy (Matt. 5:7). It is given (2) to the humble. These confess their need. There is a glorious contrast in this

story. The centurion's opinion of himself is, "Lord, I am not worthy." The opinion of others is, "He is worthy to have You do this for him." Too humble to approach the Lord, the centurion sends others (Luke 7:3). Hardly have the messengers gone when his mind conceives a new anxiety. He has invited the Lord to his house in unpardonable boldness. He will go to meet Him and beg Him to go no farther. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." (3) To the men of faith. Only twice it is said that our Lord "marveled," once at the unbelief of those who should have had abundant faith (Mark 6:6), and here at the faith of one whose opportunities had been so small. A little grace is better than many privileges. That Christ should marvel at our faith is less likely than at our want of faith. If we have few Epiphanies of mercy, it is because we have few Epiphanies of faith.

#### THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Epiphany of divine mercy toward the leper and the heathen centurion reveals God's love for all sinners, a love that brought Him to the cross. It is this mercy and love we remember and this death we celebrate and proclaim by eating and drinking Christ's body and blood together with the bread and wine in the Holy Sacrament. "God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The leper doubted whether Christ would have mercy on, and love for, a wretched creature. The centurion thought Himself unworthy to have Christ come under his roof. When we take stock of ourselves, we feel that our sin has disturbed every relation between us and a holy God. How can we expect God to love us? God's love needs to be proved. How does love prove itself? Words have their place, but we want acts. When St. Paul wished to establish the fact of God's love unshakably, he did not go back to Christ's gentle words or to His teaching of God as the Father. He pointed to nothing Christ said. He pointed to one thing God did. Christ died for us! Note the shift of the persons. God proves His love, for Christ died. Christ is interchanged with God. How does Christ's death prove God's love? Jesus Christ is the eternal God. God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. God showed His love in that Christ died for us. Christ's death proves God's love because it was for us. It was not in the interest of God. It was not that God was

unhappy without us. There was absolutely nothing selfish about God's redemption. Self-consideration played no part whatsoever.

The death of Jesus Christ is the revelation of a love that is not called forth by any loveliness on the part of the objects. It is a love that has its reason and its root in God alone. We love because we find the object lovable, because there is something in others that calls forth our love. But God loves because it is His nature. He loves because He is God. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The black mountain of sin separated us from the holy, righteous God. But the flood of God's love surged over that wall and, while engulfing us, swept the wall away. Christ died for us while we were yet objects of abhorrence to God's holy sight. This is the Gospel for men and women who know themselves to be sinners. For it will convince them of God's love in spite of their sins. There is nothing in the wide world that can assure the sinner of God's love, except the fact that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.

But in Holy Communion this morning we do not only remember and proclaim the Lord's mercy and death and love. There must be also a reaction to God's mercy on our part. It is not enough that we accept God's love as an undeniable fact. Our hearts must be touched so that we love Him as the Sovereign of our affections. Do we meet God's love with an answering love? Do we say: "We love Him because He first loved us"? If we can say that about ourselves, all is well. Proclaim the one as we say, "This is My body given for you." Affirm the other as we enter into the covenant of love by eating and drinking. Then we have not met Christ in vain at His Table, and we shall grow in the knowledge of God's love and in love for Him. We shall show our love by making our own lives an Epiphany of mercy in imitation of Christ's.

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