

Trinity 8, 2020

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.”

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

Last Sunday we considered what it means to be “servants of righteousness”, especially as we live in a culture that thinks according to what Archbishop Michael Ramsey called “the secular mind”. How can we be servants of the Lord God Almighty and yet live and function in a world where the eternal is dismissed?

The Epistle offers us some insight: As St. Paul told the Church in Rome, “If through the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live”. In other words, there is a way to do this; there is way forward, and it has to do with the Holy Spirit. “You have not received a spirit of servitude again unto fear; you have received a spirit of sonship, in which we cry aloud, ‘Abba, Father’ the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God”.

St. Paul was talking about something that was real and true for the Romans – and it is just as real and true for us – he said, “You have received a spirit of sonship – the Holy Spirit Himself bears witness (speaks to, assures, tells) with our spirit that we are the children of God”. It is a simple but powerful point: how can we live and function in a world that operates according to the secular mind and dismisses what is eternal? Only with the help of the Holy Spirit Who daily speaks to us and reminds us who we are: “You are the child of God”; “You are an heir of His kingdom”; “You are a servant of righteousness”; “You are,” (as we shall soon tell Elizabeth Ross)...“You are a member of Christ”; “You are a Christian – a follower of the Lord Jesus; and His Spirit has come to dwell in you.”

These words tell us that we are not just to be ‘good people’ or ‘decent citizens’; nor are we only to be believers in the sense that we subscribe to certain beliefs. What we are involves our whole person – our whole life. The child of God does not have a uniform that is taken off at the end of the day. We are His children because He has adopted us. He has actually given us His Spirit and taken us into His family. God has made a relationship with us through His Son and He offers to continue that relationship and unite us to Himself by coming to live in us. With that Divine power and grace, we can live with joy and purpose and hope in the secular world.

That said, there is daily effort required on our part. The Living and Eternal God – the Holy and Blessed Trinity – has not come to live in us for nothing. He has come to give us new life – the Resurrection Life of His Son – the Life that conquered all the powers of sin and death and hell. We have received that new life for a reason: to bring glory to God. But how does that work? We are only human with all kinds of pressures, anxieties, fears, temptations and failures.

In her book entitled, Concerning the Inner Life, Evelyn Underhill used the analogy of a house to explain how we can live as the children of God in a secular world.

“What type of house does the soul live in?” she asks. “It is a two story house. ...We know that we have a ground floor, a natural life biologically conditioned, with animal instincts and desires; and this life is very important, for it’s builder and Maker is God. But we know too that we have an upper floor, a supernatural life, with supernatural possibilities, a capacity for God – and that this (floor) is more important still. If we try to live on one floor alone, we destroy the mysterious beauty of our human vocation – so much a part of the life of this planet...so entirely one with the world of nature, and yet, “in the Spirit”, a habitation of God.

“We are created both in Time and Eternity – therefore a full and wholesome spiritual life can never consist in living upstairs, and forgetting to consider the ground floor and homely needs and uses...Since we are two-storey creatures, called to a natural and supernatural status, both sense and spirit must be rightly maintained, kept in order...if our full obligations are to be fulfilled. The house is built for God; to reflect on each level – both downstairs and upstairs – something of His unlimited perfection.

“Downstairs mindful of our limitations, we are called to deal rightly with our obligations of this world using justice, prudence, self-control, and courage. Upstairs, the we may lay hold of the heavenly powers of Faith, Hope and Charity. ... The soul’s house will never be a real home, unless the ground floor is as cared for and as habitable as the beautiful rooms upstairs. The whole house is meant to be beautiful and ought to be beautiful; for it comes from God and was made to His design.”

This helpful analogy may be summed up by saying that we are not to be Sunday Christians only, but rather we are to worship God and follow the Lord Jesus every

day. Little, unimportant, monotonous, ground-floor tasks are essential to the beauty of the whole house. I wonder if St. Paul was thinking about these kinds of things when he wrote, “We are children of God...and fellow-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him”. As we all know, suffering occurs on various levels: there is great physical pain and there is the suffering of trying to do the right thing in difficult circumstances.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus told His disciples that they would recognize a true prophet by their fruits. His word is a call to us to live faithfully on both stories of our house. What we watch on television; what we say behind closed doors; how we treat the waitress; how we think about the people on our street or in our building who are different from us – all of this is ground-floor stuff, but it is definitely part of the life of prayer. The first and great commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength; the second is to love our neighbour as ourself. God is no fool, He knows if the second floor activity is authentic by the way we live on the ground floor – He knows whether we love Him by the way we treat our neighbour.

As Jesus put it, “Not every one that saith unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.” In other words, action, not just words – faithfulness not lip service.

The human condition – living on two floors – is no easy task; but it is possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. We have received the Spirit of Truth – imagine that! The One Who wants to lead us to a closer walk with the Lord; the One Who offers to help us grow in Wisdom and Understanding; Discernment and Courage – He has come to lead us and to help us. By His Presence, He has also given us fellowship together as one Body or family in Christ. We are not alone.

Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh – to live after the manner of the flesh; for if you live after the manner of the flesh (with a secular mind), you will die; but if through the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the body, you will live.”

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost be ascribed all majesty, dominion, honour and glory for ever and ever . Amen.

