

The Lion

A merely parochial tabloid for members only of St. Mark's Parish, Denver, Colorado. These contents do not represent the opinions or doctrines or particular judgements of any sentient being of any species.

April 2017

Sermon for Quinquagesima 2017

The Rev'd Deacon Vladimir McDonald

at St. Mark's, Denver

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

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

ST. PAUL is setting out for the faithful of Corinth, the truth as it is perceived of this moment. He is setting out for them, what we would say was obvious, but that is in hindsight, and as we know, that is nearly always 20/20. If we are to fully appreciate his words we need to suspend our modernity, and look at the world in the first few years after the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord.

We will find a Christian world in chaos, many interpretations of the events surrounding both the life and death of Jesus, and his Resurrection and of course, the ascension. At this time, St. Paul, telling of his miracle of conversion, would have had a following of many, who would no doubt have ascribed to him, many of the attributes of our Lord. When we read St. Paul, one of the many themes that come from his teaching, is that he is to be looked upon more as John the Baptist, not Our Lord. He is constantly playing down his role, and whatever attributes he may have, he without fail, gives to the Glory of God, and takes nothing as his own. The congregations within his jurisdiction were many, and as we read him, it always seems as if, "as soon as I have finished this letter I must be on my way", to Galatia, or Cyprus, or Antioch. Always on

the move, helping, nurturing, feeding, teaching; in other words, spreading Love, or as his words and those of Jesus admonish us, showing charity. In this context, obviously, we are talking of the Love of Humanity, the Love of God for His people, shown here to those early churches through the acts of, in this case, his disciple St. Paul.

Loving humanity is difficult in the best of circumstances. We come to our relationships with others, often with trepidation and possibly prejudice. It should be obvious that this way of approaching God's children is self-destructive and wrong. We are all the Children of God, our variations of ethnicity, color, belief, are in part what make us the wonderful fulfillment of the promise of God. It is with regret that I say, I feel, we have a long way to go to tap into our true humanity in God. We have the tendency to drop into a trance, where we are the only ones to be right, and all others are wrong; we have all the answers, and everyone else is operating in a fog of despair. This is so selfish, and very much, not charity. We find ourselves with others of a like-mind, and it is so easy to be carried along with the crowd, it takes a strong faith in Our Lord to stop, turn and face the crowd, and say "No, you are wrong, I will show Charity to my fellow travelers on this journey through life, please join me". We do not have to agree with all those around us, we do not have to like all those we come in contact with, we do not have to understand their point of view; what we do have to do is acknowledge their right to exist and hold the opinions they espouse. Do not like those opinions you say, they do not show the love and understanding St Paul is talking about, well welcome to the world that is still looking for the Disciples, that is still searching for the One True God, Our savior, Jesus Christ.

If we have found Him, how blessed we are; if we are searching for Him still, how blessed we are on that journey, by Our Lord. Why, because He blesses us for our commitment to that belief that He came to earth to be the Savior of His people, we are his people, and we wish to be with and in and of Him.

Where does all this tie in to Quinquagesima and the beginning of the Great Lent?

It should I hope, inform us again of our frailty as humans. It should expose our beliefs to a deeper scrutiny by us of what we really want from our relationship with God. It should make us think deeply of whether we want that relationship, do we really believe that Our Lord hung on the Cross for Our Salvation, that He took, and takes, our sins unto himself to exonerate us of their burden. So that at the last, we will come into his presence with a clean heart. Is that where we find ourselves? Scared out of our skin by the overwhelming weight of our scarred humanity.

I would hope that we can take this opportunity that is presented to us formally by the Church, in the guise of its' Great Lent, to sit and contemplate ourselves within the terms of Our Lords expectations, and realize, maybe for the first time, that we are not alone. He is always there with us to place a hand under our elbow and lift us up, so that if we stumble, we do not have to fall into the depths of despair, but can strive to continue in this life as a Loving and Trusting child of God, seeing all as His children, and trying to help those we can, to find the Salvation that we know is there to be had by us all.

Will we always succeed, no; will there always be evil in this world, given that it is ruled by earthly princes who are themselves often ruled by the forces of Darkness, one would have to say probably yes; does that mean we should quit, not at all, if anything that should encourage us to persevere. It will not be easy, as I have already said, but is it worth it, more than all the riches of this earthly life.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Palm Sunday

Come, all who would proclaim
One Who comes in the Name;
process from darkness to the light
shedding branches at the feet
of the One we would acclaim.

But be forewarned, the fruit
and end is absolute;
the one who claims the One
must of self repent
if he would see the heart's pursuit.

Crosses, nails, thorny crowns, and spear
await the cryer's claim and cheer;
followers emulate the pain
and bear the loss of One
Who draws and would draw near.

Claims are easy, simply pled,
meaning well, lightly branish-ed.
One who claims must also go
shedding sins, saying no,
for self to walk within His Stead.

Submitted by the V. Rev'd James Rooney

GUIDING THE ARK OF SALVATION - THE THEANTHROPIC ROLE OF THE BISHOP

by Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) and Peter Schweitzer
As presented at the Church of St Patrick, Warrenton, Virginia

THERE is a common tendency in our Western culture to equate the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Orthodox Church to corporations which are institutional structures that are driven by commerce and production. In so doing, we equate bishops with CEOs and priests and deacons as mid-level managers. Accordingly, parish councils operate as ecclesiastical boards of directors, bishops operate at the pleasure of the parish councils, and priests and deacons implement the directives and goals set forth by the councils. The adoption of this corporate model for the Church can be enticing at times since it is efficient, goal-oriented, and produces tangible results. It is especially tempting when a parish is intent on building a new temple, school, or other worthy project.

However, it's a model that betrays the original nature and purpose of the Church according to the mind of Christ (1Cor. 2:16). While the corporate model is a necessary vehicle for commerce and economic vitality, it has no place in the Church founded by Christ. Since it is impossible to envisage the episcopal office as well as the clerical ranks of priest and deacon outside of the context of the Church, it is first necessary to examine the nature of the Church before we reflect upon the office of bishop and how he relates to the clerical orders and the laity.

The Sacred Scriptures and the holy fathers provide us with the true model of the Church which is the Ark of Salvation. This notion of the Church as the Ark of Salvation is prefigured in the Old Testament figures of Noah and Moses. Saint Cyprian of Carthage affirms this in stating, "the one ark of Noah was a type of the one Church." [i] Father Patrick Henry Reardon notes that this symbolism is found in Noah's ark as well as the infant Moses floating on the Nile River. "The root of such symbolism is found in the Old Testament's own portrayal of Noah's ark. Genesis calls it a *tevah*, a word used in only one other place in the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, to designate the little box in which the infant Moses floated on the Nile. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the two stories seems clearly inten-

tional if we examine the manifest similarities between them. First, in respect to both Noah and Moses, the *tevah* is a floating container that preserves life from the peril of drowning. That is to say, the threat comes from water. Second, in each case the container is daubed with pitch to keep out the threatening water (6:14; Exodus 2:3). Third, both stories contribute to the ongoing biblical theme of God's deliverance of His servants in times of crisis. There is an even subtler element here, however. The word *tevah* is not Hebrew; it is Egyptian, in which language it may designate a box, a chest, even a coffin. Its use in only these two biblical passages cries out for an explanation. . . I can think of a single reasonable answer: Namely, that the biblical author had in mind to tie these two accounts together in a very explicit way, so that the correspondence between them would be unmistakable." [ii]

This imagery was not lost on the holy fathers who employed it in describing the Church founded by Christ. Saint Cyprian of Carthage writes, "If anyone who was outside the ark could have escaped, so would he escape who was outside the Church." [iii] In the fourth century, Saint John Chrysostom continues the use of this imagery in his Homily on Lazarus, "The narrative of the Flood is a mystery, and its details are a type of things to come. The ark is the Church; Noah is Christ; the dove, the Holy Spirit; the olive branch, the divine goodness. As in the midst of the sea, the ark protected those who were within it, so the Church saves those who are saved." [iv] The Church is the ark, as real and concrete as an ark of wood and as essential for salvation from the floods of this world as a ship is for those drowning at sea. [v]

As the ark of salvation, prefigured in the Old Testament and fully realized in the New Testament and the life of the Church, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church enjoys a character which no human institution may claim. The Church is theanthropic. This is a term that is central to Orthodoxy for it undergirds the manner in which we speak about God, understand the Church, and most importantly, engage in the spiritual struggle. Unlike the West which relies on philosophical systems of thought, the East, specifically the Orthodox Church employs theanthropicity to orient and provide the proper context for everything pertaining to the history of salvation. Simply put, the term refers to the union of God and man first and foremost, in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and following directly from that to the Church and the mission of the Church—the salvation of mankind. Theanthropicity implies an understanding of man's existence

and salvation in relation to His Creator and Savior. Just as Noah and Moses relied upon God to make manifest the divine will, so too the Church acknowledges this synergy between God and man to preach the Good News of salvation. God must act first and this must be acknowledged. We do not and cannot save ourselves. However, God's action must be reciprocated by our response. This notion has been relegated to the background in the West. God alone can satisfy the unquenchable human desire for life without end. This is also the reason why the Church is principally the Divine Liturgy, and not a worldly or social organization.

As Saint Justin Popovic writes,

"The attributes of the Church are innumerable because her attributes are actually the attributes of the Lord Christ, the God-man, and, through Him, those of the Triune Godhead. However, the holy and divinely wise fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council, guided and instructed by the Holy Spirit, reduced them in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith to four — I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. These attributes of the Church — unity, holiness, catholicity (*sobornost*), and apostolicity — are derived from the very nature of the Church and of her purpose. They clearly and accurately define the character of the Orthodox Church of Christ whereby, as a theanthropic institution and community, she is distinguishable from any institution or community of the human sort.

Just as the Person of Christ the God-man is one and unique, so is the Church founded by Him, in Him, and upon Him. The unity of the Church follows necessarily from the unity of the Person of the Lord Christ, the God-man. Being an organically integral and theanthropic organism unique in all the worlds, the Church, according to all the laws of Heaven and earth, is indivisible. Any division would signify her death. Immersed in the God-man, she is first and foremost a theanthropic organism, and only then a theanthropic organization. In her, everything is theanthropic: nature, faith, love, baptism, the Eucharist, all the holy mysteries and all the holy virtues, her teaching, her entire life, her immortality, her eternity, and her structure.

Yes, yes, yes; in her, everything is theanthropically integral and indivisible Christification, sanctification, deification, Trinitarianism, salvation. In her everything is fused organically and by grace into a single theanthropic body, under a single Head — the God-man, the Lord Christ.

All her members, though as persons always whole and inviolate, yet united by the same grace of the Holy Spirit through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues into an organic unity, comprise one body and confess the one faith, which unites them to each other and to the Lord Christ.

The Christ-bearing apostles are divinely inspired as they announce the unity and the uniqueness of the Church, based upon the unity and uniqueness of her Founder — the God-man, the Lord Christ, and His theanthropic personality. Like the holy apostles, the holy fathers and the teachers of the Church confess the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church with the divine wisdom of the cherubim and the zeal of the seraphim. Understandable, therefore, is the fiery zeal which animated the holy fathers of the Church in all cases of division and falling away and the stern attitude toward heresies and schisms. In that regard, the holy ecumenical and holy local councils are preeminently important. According to their spirit and attitude, wise in those things pertaining to Christ, the Church is not only one but also unique. Just as the Lord Christ cannot have several bodies, so He cannot have several Churches. According to her theanthropic nature, the Church is one and unique, just as Christ the God-man is one and unique.”[vi]

To be continued in the May 2017 LION

[i] Cyprian of Carthage, Letters, 75:2 (New Advent) Translated by Robert Ernest Wallis. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

[ii] Patrick Henry Reardon, Creation and the Patriarchal Histories (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press Ministries), p. 58-59.

[iii] Cyprian, On the Unity of the Catholic Church, 6 (New Advent) Translated by Robert Ernest Wallis. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight.

John Chrysostom, Homily on Lazarus 6

[v] Hieromonk Alexios Karakallinos, “Contours of Conversion and the Ecumenical Movement”, a talk presented at the September, 2004 conference “Ecumenism: Origins, Expectations, Disenchantment”, sponsored by the School of Pastoral Theology, The Aristotelian University, Thessaloniki, Greece,

[vi] Justin Popovic, Originally published in Orthodox Life, vol. 31, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1981), pp. 28-33. Translated by Stephen Karganovic from The Orthodox Church & Ecumenism (in Serbian) by Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) (Thessalonica: Chilandar Monastery, 1974), pp. 64-74.

THE FEAST DAY OF SAINT JACOB

OF HAMATOURA

Archimandrite Pandleimon (Farah)

Abbot of the Monastery of Hamatoura

October 15, 2011

*Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
now and ever and unto the ages of ages, amen.*

I WANTED TO CONGRATULATE YOU on this noble feast, since you have come from different places to spend the night, despite the cold, in prayer, to warm yourselves in your prayer and to be made holy through this great saint, the hieromartyr Jacob of Hamatoura.

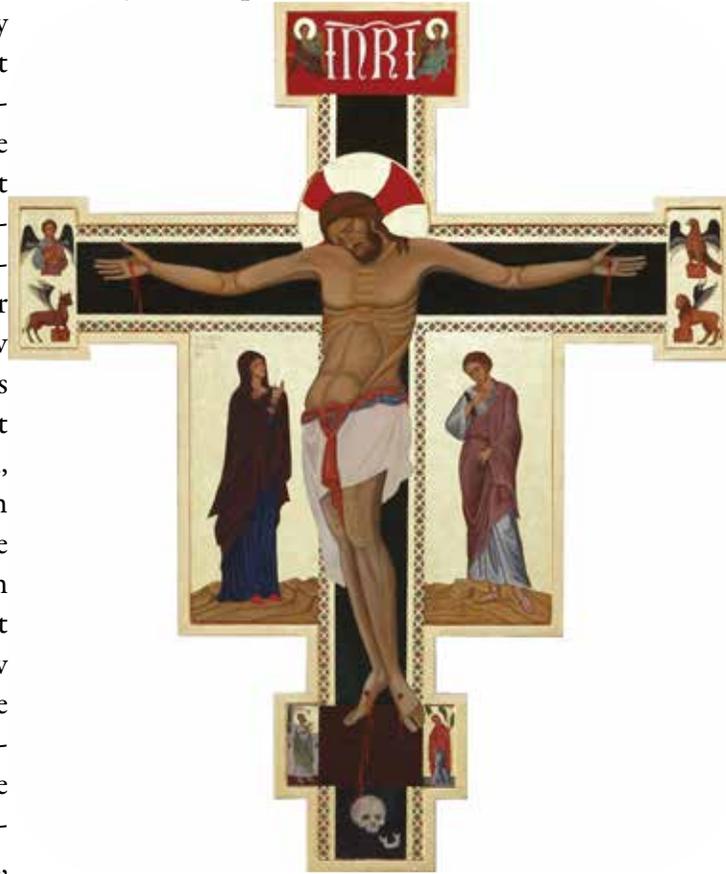
What strikes in the readings that we heard today from the Gospel and the Epistle, is the part that pertains to education. It says that someone who wants to be an authentic son, not an illegitimate one, must endure his father’s corrections and be obedient in order to practice, through this obedience, fulfilling his duty and realizing his sonship. One who is corrected by his father, he is an authentic son, but one who is not corrected is illegitimate-- that is, inauthentic-- and does not have the same traits as his father. Here it means belief and faith, not beauty or appearance or other inherited traits. This is because one who is corrected by the Lord bears and possesses the Lord’s traits and in this way he is able to live within society but apart from society. “You are not of the world, though I have chosen you out of the world,” but you are distinct from the world in your mentality and your behavior. A Christian cannot resemble the people of the world. People offer you lusts, they offer you whims, they offer selfishness, and you cannot be that way. You are corrected by the Lord so that you will be different from this society and so that you will rise up to a holy, heavenly, society.

If we compare this text that we are hearing with our life in our Christian society today, we find ourselves embarrassed. This is because Christians in general do not act according to the Gospel, do not adhere to it, and do not practice and learn from it. They are far from it and for this reason witness and holiness are rare and the level of human thought is declining, because it is losing holy illumination. It is losing the effectiveness of grace because it receives it and makes it useless and does not put it into action. But one who practices the Lord’s commandments, he receives grace upon grace from God and again and again practices developing this grace, cooperating with it,

making it effective in his life in order to attain the holiness that the Lord wills for him.

Saint Jacob, despite the social circumstances that surrounded his life in those times, practiced the love of the Lord to the utmost limits. This is why he accepted suffering and difficulty with joy and relish, and he did not accept to be saved by society which offered him false faith. He did not accept what reigned in his society. Rather, he accepted to be defiant, not out of selfishness or pride, but because he knew the truth. When we say this verb 'he knows', it means that he has experience with God, because true faith is for them to know that You, the true God, and Your Son whom You sent, Jesus Christ. 'That they know You,' not know about You intellectually. The human intellect is not capable of comprehending divine thought. However, it is capable of getting to know you, that is to obtain practical, life experience through prayer, through the holy mysteries, and through reading the holy scriptures.

This is how the saint lived, unwavering, bearing suffering and hardships unto death, and slander just like we see today in our day. The thinking is the same because its source is the Evil One. A Christian does not return evil for evil, but he does stay firm in his struggle and rejects sin every day in his home, his work, his business, and his interactions with people. Then he is able to be a martyr. God did not allow persecutions to be continuous because we are weak and because we do not prepare every day to die for the sake of the love of Christ. We persist in our sins, far from His love. So He has mercy on us, since if the Evil One stirred up persecution against us, not one of us would remain steadfast. But we trust in His mercy, He who helps us, makes us capable, and extends His grace to us, so that we might continue in our struggle and be made holy. In the abundance of His love-- indeed, in the excess of His love-- He does not accept for us to perish. Rather, He wants us to be saved and be made holy. He waits for us.



When we approach Him even a little, He rushes to meet and embrace us and make us steadfast in our holy struggle.

Be steadfast and learn from the Holy Bible, its morals and teachings, so that in your daily life you will truly be witnesses to Him, so that at your end you will be made worthy of the holy crown of martyrdom, so that you will attain the kingdom of heaven, joyous with the saints whom we celebrate every day, to whom we sing hymns so that we will be encouraged to imitate them and be made holy like them.

May Saint Jacob of Hamatoura intercede for all of us. May he make our way easy in every good work that pleases God. Let us be corrected by Him and let us walk in a way that pleases Him, scorning every lust and every desire that the world offers us, so that we may strip off, as the Lord said, this world, being raised up to His love. Amen.

Our thanks to Subdeacon Jason Zacharias Falcone for submitting this Address to the pious readers of the LION.

Please observe that 14 May, the 4th Sunday in Paschaltide, will include an Episcopal Visitation with Bishop Basil and the **Ordination**, *Deo volente*, of the Rev'd Deacon **James Tochihara** to the Sacred Priesthood of the Holy Catholic and Orthodox Church appointed to the Altar of St. Mark's, Denver. The Ordination Liturgy at 10:00 o'clock followed by Reception Lunch by the Church Women. Please RSVP for Lunch to jcc@westernorthodox.com or the Church telephone 303-722-0707 at least 7 days before the event.

Holy Week this Year will be observed from the 'old' Order prior to the Reform of Pope Pius XII so more text/ceremony and yet not quite so bizarre in details... like consecrating the water for the Baptismal Font in a bucket or dividing the Litany of the Saints with a novel discourse on 'vows.'

By the mercy of God we have scheduled a Baptism and two Chrismations for ***Easter Day at the Principal Liturgy at 10:00*** o'clock. Your prayers for all the Catechumens throughout the Universal Church this Year of Grace MMXVII.

Sermon for the III Sunday in Lent

Offered at Saint Mark's Church, Denver

Subdeacon John Brainerd

Ephesians 5:1-2 – *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”*

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

IN TODAY'S EPISTLE, SAINT PAUL advises us to be as little children, and follow Our Lord wheresoever he will lead us. This is good advice. What could be wiser, more prudent, than following the Lord creator of the universe as he leads us on our walk through life? Now, it might be helpful to learn from others' lives who have walked with Our Lord, that their lives might give us insight into what lives are like when we do and do not follow God as little children, and walk in his love.

Last weekend, I had the privilege of attending the Diocese of Wichita Lenten Men's retreat in Victoria, Kansas. Among members of various parishes in the diocese from Colorado, Kansas, and Oklahoma, my son Oliver was also able to attend. I want to just say thank you to Oliver for literally sharing my walk with the Lord for seven hundred and fifty miles and down I-70, and for his charitable comments and criticism yesterday afternoon of my attempts to distill a word or two of value out of what I had heard at the retreat. Oliver told me what to write. Thanks, Oliver.

Our retreat was led by Father Calinic Berger, of Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles. The theme of our retreat was: “King David and his Struggles: A Guide for the Spiritual Life.” I would like to offer a word or two about David. I would like to contrast his life with that of his king, his hero, his father-in-law, and finally his nemesis, King Saul. David and Saul were two men, both chosen and anointed by God, both leaders of the chosen people, both men falling repeatedly from the path of the Lord. How was it that one was always able to return to the walk as a child of God, the other could not?

In all the drama, tragedy, and glory, of David's life, we sometimes lose track of his predecessor King Saul. Saul was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel, just as David would be a few years later. These anointings Father Calinic explained to us very much prefigured our own Orthodox chrismation. Both Saul and David received gifts when they were anointed, gifts of the Holy Spirit, just as we do in chrismation. Saul received the gift in his heart to hear the voice of God. And, for a little while, he listened, and was able to walk with the Lord and freely follow where God led him. But within a very short time, less than two years of his anointing, the Israelites are at war with the Amalekites. Saul is told by God to destroy the Amalekites, to the last

woman, child, cow, goat, and donkey. He kills almost everybody and most of the animals, but he spares the Amalekite king and the best of the livestock for trophies. Then, when confronted with his self-indulgence by Samuel, he lies about it, and says he did it for the people.

David too, was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel. After his anointing, he walks freely on the Lord's way, as a child, just as Saul did years before. While walking on the Lord's path, he is able to defeat Goliath, elude the jealous Saul, while gathering a band of brothers and living as a righteous leader in the wilderness, and eventually becoming king of Israel.

But, David too, failed on the path, and didn't always walk as a child with the Lord. When he had been king for many years, he fell in love with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Uriah was one of his band of brothers from his outlaw days. At the time, Israel was at war. David had another of the band of brothers, Joab, order Uriah to the forefront of the battle so that he would be killed. Once Uriah was dead, David was free to marry Bathsheba, and did so promptly. Now, just as Samuel confronted Saul, Nathan the prophet confronts David. What is David's reaction? In 2 Samuel 12:13, David says, *“I have sinned against the LORD.”* David says, *“I have sinned against the LORD.”*

So, how does this all turn out for Saul and David? You probably all know. Saul's self-indulgence with the Amalekites, along with all sorts of other poor decisions, led him to a grim sad death, the death of his sons, and the removal of the kingship of Israel from his house. David on the other hand, while making his share of poor and sinful choices, seducing Bathsheba, having Uriah killed, etc., etc., etc., founded a kingship and a kingdom that lasted for centuries, is known as the archetypal king of the Jewish people, and is the ancestor of the Messiah, the Son of David, as the Messiah is named in scripture.

Well, if they both made lots of bad choices, disobeyed God, strayed from the walk of the Lord, what was the difference? The difference was that Saul was unable to find it in his heart to repent. He would disobey, as in the case of the Amalekites, he was fearful and could not trust the Lord, when confronted with the Goliath the Philistine, his life is full of these failures. He was unable, except at the very beginning of his kingship, to take responsibility for himself, and repent. When Saul left his walk with the Lord by not treating the Amalekites as he knew he must, he needed to find his way back. He needed to admit the truth of his sin, and repent of it. David on the other hand, so loved the Lord, that even when he strayed from his walk with the Lord, when confronted with the truth, he admitted it, he accepted it, he embraced it, *“I have sinned against the LORD”* he says.

The story of Saul and David occurs at perhaps the most pivotal time in the history of Israel. Their lives and choices literally shape Israel, the Jewish people, and the salvation of mankind. Because of this, we get to read all about these

two men's lives, triumphs, failures, and successes. Now, most of us are not acting on this kind of stage. I am certainly not responsible for the lives of millions of people, as far as I know. Most of the things I might do from which I might need to repent, most of the things I do and have done that take me from the walk as a little child with the Lord are known by only a few others, or maybe no one but myself. So why would I need to repent, if no one knows, or only a few know, and probably don't care? The answer is obvious I know, but it has to be said: I have to find my way back onto the path, to walk as a little child with Our Lord, in obedience and love, because my Lord my love, calls and wishes it. And so do you, so do we all.

Take a moment this Lent to reflect on Saul and David, both the chosen of God, both the Lord's anointed. One, through fear, self-indulgence, laziness, unable to admit the truth of his sins, and repent, the other perhaps equally fearful, self-indulgent, and lazy, but still able, through a great and unshakable love for the Lord, to repent and repent and repent again, and find his way back each time to the walk of love, as a dear child of God.

Ephesians 5:1-2 – *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”*

Notes from the Subdeacon, *copyright* 2017 Joseph Vacca

Wednesday of Lent IV - *Feria of the Great Scrutiny* -

THIS DAY gets its special name because in the Church at Rome this was the point at which list of those who were to receive Baptism at the Easter Vigil was closed. Prior to this day instruction in the fundamentals of the Faith was given. Candidates were made to understand that they would be making a commitment not only to live a life in obedience to the commands of the Gospel but also to profess their faith in Christ even in the face of torture and death. (This goes back to the earliest days of the Church to a time when Christianity was illegal and Christians who did not renounce their Faith could face the severest penalties.) Candidates started instruction at the beginning of Lent. They would attend the first part of the Mass, up to the Gospel and homily. The deacon would then formally dismiss them and they would then leave.

Incidentally, this daily instruction is one of the chief reasons that Lent is the only liturgical season in which there is at Mass a specific set of lessons (Gospels & Epistles) and minor propers for each day, without exception from Ash Wednesday through Holy Week. This instruction required the Church to teach the candidates – as Christ did for the

two disciples walking to Emmaus – how the Law and the Prophets, indeed all of the Old Testament, pointed clearly to Christ (cf Luke 24:25-28). Therefore in the Mass the lessons before the Gospel at this time are almost exclusively from the Old Testament.

On this day (Wednesday of Lent IV), the candidates for baptism would assemble in the church with their sponsors around the hour of noon. The Bishop, assisted by various priests, deacons, subdeacons, readers and servers presided at what must have been an impressive ceremony. The names of the candidates were all written down along with the names of their sponsors. Then a priest said a special prayer over them that formally made them catechumens, signed them on the forehead with the Cross and gave each one a taste of blessed salt. They would then be escorted out of the Church proper, there to wait until called. The Mass would then start with this Introit from the Prophet Ezekiel:

Ezek. 36:24 (*Cum sanctificatus*) When I shall be sanctified in you, I will gather you out of all countries: and I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness: and a new spirit will I put within you. Ps. 34:1. I will always give thanks unto the Lord : his praise shall ever be in my mouth.

The names of the catechumens were read out one by one and they were brought back into the body of the Church and rejoined their sponsors. The Bishop (or whichever priest was presiding in his stead) then sang a collect and the deacon had the sponsors each make the sign of the Cross on the forehead of the catechumen he or she was sponsoring. After this, exorcisms were said over each of the catechumens.

Next the first of two lessons before the Gospel was sung by a reader or subdeacon. (For the reader's convenience, both are set out as an appendix at the end.) Note that the first verse of this lesson is the same as the Introit. Ezekiel is one of the Major Prophets (the others are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and the author of the Lamentations) who was active from 593 BC to 553 BC. Sometime before then Jerusalem had been captured by the Babylonians, the Temple had been destroyed and the inhabitants deported to Babylon. The reason for these great disasters was a simple one: Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord God. They had mingled the worship of various pagan idols with the worship of God in violation of the commandments of God's covenant with them.

However, God is very merciful and through the Prophets promised salvation not only from the material captivity in Babylon but also from the far more serious captivity to sin and death. By Ezekiel, God assures us that He will gather all of His people from all nations whithersoever they have been carried and will cleanse them with clean water. This restoration from the Babylonian Exile prefigured the waters of baptism which is the effectual sacramental sign of the spiri-

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tual regeneration that the catechumens will receive. After the lesson was completed, was sung a Gradual from Psalm 34.

Next came the lesson from the Prophet Isaiah, who was active in the last half of the 8th Century BC and is perhaps the most important of the Prophets. St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us that the Prophet Isaiah “knew more perfectly than all others the mystery of the religion of the Gospel”. St. Jerome extolls him, saying, “He was more of an Evangelist than a Prophet, because he described all of the Mysteries of the Church of Christ so vividly that you would assume he was not prophesying about the future, but rather was composing a history of past events.” In this lesson there is foretold the remission of sins which is to come to those who will be cleansed in Holy Baptism. As is customary, this lesson was also followed by a Gradual from one of the Psalms.

While these lessons and their proper Graduals were being chanted, the Bishop or a priest assisting went to each of the catechumens, touched his ears and said *Ephpheta* (be opened). This was in accordance with the example of Christ did to the deaf and dumb man as recorded in the Gospel (Mark 7:32-34). This ceremony has special significance because it prepared the catechumens to receive the full glory of the Christian Faith which up to this time had been explained to them veiled in allegory.

After this was done, the four Gospels were presented to the catechumens. This was done with great ceremony: four deacons, each carrying a book of one of the Gospels, accompanied by acolytes with candles and incense, entered the sanctuary and laid a Gospel on each of the corners of the altar. After an explanation of the importance of each Gospel by the Bishop, each deacon, in turn, read the first verses of his Gospel, specifically: Matthew 1:1-21, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 1:1-17 and John 1:1-14. Each reading was followed by an explanation of the specific symbol for each Evangelist:

- Matthew is symbolized by a man because he gives the genealogy of Christ and begins with the human birth of the Saviour.
- Mark is symbolized by a lion since he begins his Gospel with the desert, saying: A voice of one crying in the desert: prepare ye the way of the Lord and because our Saviour now reigns and is invincible
- An ox is the symbol for Luke, because he emphasizes that the Lord was offered as a sacrifice for our sins.
- The eagle is the symbol for John who “soars aloft into high places” as he explains the union of divine and human natures in the one Person of Christ.

This Essay continues with the Apostles’ Creed and other devotions. See Subdeacon Joseph’s extensive essays and recordings at : www.thespiritualworkshop.org

Palm Sunday, 9 April : Mass 8:00 and 10:00 with blessing of Palms/Olive or other branches

Holy Wednesday, 12 April : Mass 12 noon

Maundy Thursday, 13 April : Evensong 6:30 PM Mass 7:00 PM

Good Friday, 14 April : Veneration of the Cross, Pre-Sanctified beginning at 12 noon
Veneration of the Cross, Stations beginning at 6:00 PM

Holy Saturday, 15 April : beginning at 8:00 PM :
Paschal Vigil, Blessing of Baptismal Water, Litany of the Saints and Vigil Mass

Easter Day, 16 April : Aurora Mass : 8:00 o’clock
Principal Mass of the Resurrection : 10:00 o’clock

This represents the practice of the Mystic Occident. Oriental parishes offer Paschal Liturgy at midnight or earlier Saturday. The timing of the Resurrection Mass varies in the old country of reference as well as the new world. The Missal usage is that observed on Sundays: an “Early Mass” and a “Principal Mass” on Easter Day.

For Liturgical adventurers bent on an overdose of Paschal Joy we advise, research the local Churches and pack in as many Liturgies as possible. So many choices, so little time!

The LION

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