Tr5(2023)[Orig.2011]

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*“Sanctify the Lord in your heart”*. 1 Peter 3:14

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Saint Peter figures prominently in our Lessons for today. Between them we witness a remarkable growth in his faith. He had indeed gone from a fisher-man to a fisher of men.

Our Gospel recounts his “calling ” by the Lord. Here we saw a Peter who was doubtful and probably exasperated. He and his partners had been fishing in the Sea of Gennesaret.

This large lake in Northern Israel has been called by to other names, the Sea of Tiberius, as well as today the "Sea of Galilee". This Sea, or Lake, is about 20 miles long and eight miles wide. At 200 feet below sea level it is the lowest freshwater lake on earth. (It is south of a smaller lake found on maps**:** "Lake Hula".) The Jordan river runs through it onto the Dead Sea well south of it and east of Jerusalem. St. Peter's hometown of Capernaum where he lived is on its northern shore.

When told by Jesus to let down his nets again for a big catch Peter responded as we probably would, “Lord, we have labored all night and caught nothing”. He then however shows a kernel of faith by being willing to try something seemingly hopeless and stupid, just because the Lord asked him. Peter replies: but, if you say so, we will try ONE MORE TIME. This showed his trust, however grudgingly, to take one more step, to take**:** A chance.

And what happened with that one chance, that one step? He and the others had an enormous catch! But, but, what is more striking is Peter's reaction to the catch. Unlike we he didn't not shout "wow!" or "yesssssss!", or, much less like the great boxer Muhammad Ali, "I am the greatest!" No. Instead, St. Peter told Jesus that this fisherman was not worthy even to be in Jesus' presence. Peter was a paragon of humility.

Our Epistle shows a different Peter, by then one full of faith. Scholars are not certain when the two canonical letters attributed to Peter were written, but they were safely many, many years after Jesus' Ascension and before his martyrdom around 66AD.

Thus, we have a spiritually fully mature St. Peter giving the Church advice on how: **to** live. This continues the basic theme of the last several Sundays' lessons which have dealt with the issue of: “how to live as a Christian”, especially in an unfriendly world?

Two weeks back on Trinity 3 we heard St. Peter advise and encourage his suffering brethren that namely, “the same afflictions are” visited upon others. St. Paul also encouraged the young Church by reckoning that the “sufferings of the present are not to be compared to the glory which is to” come. That same day the Gospel from Luke encouraged folks to live by the Golden Rule and not just avoid hurting others, but **actively** doing good to others.

St. Peter's advice today echoes St. Luke's. It is advice on how to live as a Christian, both alone and in community. He points out that there are six great and unique virtues or qualities to the Christian life which are uncommon outside the Christian Church.

We see the first quality of Christian **unity** in his advice that “all be of one mind”. We see the quality of **sympathy** in his advice to “have compassion”. We see the quality of **charity** in his admonition to “live as brethren”. We see another quality, that of **compassion**, in Peter's advice to be “pitiful”, or full of pity, and not de-sensitized to suffering, ala the rich man and Lazarus four weeks back.

Finally, we see Peter showcasing two more unique qualities of the Christian life. Christians should be **humble**, or has he calls it “courteous”. And people should be **forgiving**, not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing, but, instead... blessing others.

All six of these qualities (unity, sympathy, charity, compassion, humility and forgiveness) are made possible where one has **a**... passionate love of goodness. Peter instructs us to that end that we are to “sanctify” our hearts.

Sanctify comes from the Latin, *sanctus*, meaning holy or separate. We are to separate our heart to love for God. Passion, as we know, is a powerful emotion. When we fall in love we are passionate about someone else. He or she is the most important person in our life.

If one is as passionate about **goodness** as, say, a Navy Seal might be about America, then one has the correct attitude. And, with that attitude, a passion for goodness, the fascination with wrong or lesser ends and pursuits **will** disappear, and lose their power.

As I have said before, attitude is critical to being a Christian. While the Lord is interested in what we do he is perhaps MORE interested in "the why". St. Peter is instructing that we need to make Jesus supreme in our life, the most important thing in our day. So, if we want to be a good Christian, we need to ask ourselves a question: what is the most important thing in my life?

For the young it might be, “to have fun, excitement” or to have a good career. For us older types it might be, “to have a secure retirement”. While both of these goals are understandable and very human, having the central focus of one's life on anything other than our relationship with the Lord is still misplaced. It is replacing the BEST with the second best in one's life. We all do this; folks who don't become saints.

So, yes, we are disoriented if we make the center of our lives something perishable. Something is perishable in the sense that it can disappear, waste away or be taken away. Jesus himself talks about storing up wealth in heaven where our treasure can neither wither away nor be stolen.

Certainly financial wealth can disappear through lawsuits, fraud (such as identity theft), or prolonged illness such as cancer. And as we each know, the treasure of good health can change rapidly and fade away. Probably the hardest thing to lose or have taken away is our education. But even might happen via brain injuries, Alzheimer's, etc.

As we know, the Lord often works through travail to re-orient us in our life. It may have happened to us or another loved one, but we all have heard the expression: "it took X to wake me up" to what is most important in life. Usually that is a reference to family over work or other activities, but even **family** should not become the center of our life. Problems can flow from it. One can become controlling of one's children or miserly in making certain that **your** family has “enough”. Such, even though well intentioned, can act to separate us from having Christ, or goodness, as the center of our universe.

The devil obviously wants to hurt us and move away from God, and so we suffer. But God always turns the tables on the devil to hurt him. God has his hand on the controls. He won't let us suffer more than we can handle. So when we suffer it is for a purpose. Maybe he needs us to be ready to help someone else who will go through something similar down the road.

While the devil would love to be able by himself to move us from Christ only we can. To echo St. Paul: “what can separate us from the love of Christ?” Indeed, even if we move away from the Lord, we **still** are in his hands. It is our side of the relationship, back towards **him**, that is something we always control.

It is called**:** Atonement. It literally means, “at-one-ment”. When bad things such as illness happen to us the devil tries to wreck our trust in the Lord. But, it is not the devil's decision, to move us away from Jesus. It is one **we** ultimately choose to make. **We** have to move away. Closeness to the Lord cannot be forcibly taken away by the outside world via disease, fraud or lawsuit.

While the devil tries to get us to decide to move us away from trusting in the Lord and make our relationship with him unimportant, the Holy Spirit and angels work to inspire us to trust the Lord one more time, and in so doing to move even closer to him. As we move closer, we are, whether we know it consciously or not, pursuing goodness, for the Lord is good. As goodness becomes more and more important to us, things that are not good, even if they are not wicked, lose their luster, their appeal, their fascination. In short, lesser or even wicked things lose their power over us in our lives.

On a human level we might have seen this in our own lives. Maybe before we met our spouse we lived a wild, loose life, pursuing whatever seem the most fun at the moment. Afterwards, after meeting our future spouse and then throughout marriage, such goals have come to be viewed as immature as we enjoy life with our “other half”.

As one pursues goodness, as we sanctify our hearts to Jesus, we still will run into problems and still will suffer. But, earthly avenues which hurt us, coming from other people or disasters will not be able tarnish what has become the most important matter in our life. Again, how can disease remove us from God's care or by itself **make** us trust him less? Similarly, how can one be defrauded out of His love?

Thus, we see that Peter by the time he wrote this letter had grown tremendously in wisdom, from the tired fisherman who wanted to call it a day and just barely gave it one more try. He had grown to know and love Jesus since that early day on the Sea of Gennessaret. St. Peter **had** known Jesus in life in a manner which we never can experience in our own human lives. But, we need to remember the scared apostle he was at the time of Jesus' death even after three years of being with Jesus daily and witnessing his miracles.

St. Peter remained scared until the Resurrection. But even then he was still not brave enough to preach on the Temple steps until he had received the Holy Spirit. We have received that same Spirit to guide and explain all things to us, just as he did for St. Peter and the other Apostles. The Spirit of **Christ** helped Peter grow enormously and mature in the love of goodness.

A love of goodness brings about the growth of the six beautiful and uniquely Christian virtues or qualities of life: unity among Christians, sympathy for others, charity towards all, compassion for the suffering, humility in our own selves, and forgiveness towards wrongdoers.

All these begin flowing from examining our **attitude** toward what is most important to us. If it is the pursuit of goodness, sanctifying our hearts to God, then the appeal of badness will fade in our lives. And, if all Christians did this, then the world, as we asked in our opening Collect, really would be "so peaceably ordered that the Church could joyfully serve in Godly quietness". Amen. +