

REMEMBERING GOD'S WILL

Hear the Word of God for this *Reminiscere* Sunday, as this Sunday in, but not of, Lent is given to us to *Remember* that which God has done for us in Christ Jesus:

For this remains the will of the God: the "holification" of all of you...¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This is the Sunday in the Church year, given to us every year, for which the theme is, "Remember." That title is drawn from the Latin translation of the opening words of the ancient Psalm Introit, "Entrance Psalm." In such Psalm verses or hymns the Eastern and Western Church, since at least the 7th century AD, has heard the opening Propers of the Day (the changeable readings). Such were normally chanted, sung, or spoken as the presiding pastor/bishop/patriarch and his attendants entered the Nave of the Church (Germanus, 19; Senn, 184). (At CLC, following Reformation tradition, the words of the Introit were recited as we entered into the chancel to approach the Table of the Lord for the first time in today's Lord's service). The ancient opening words appointed for the Lord's service to His people on *Reminiscere* begin with a penitential call to God: "Remember Your mercy O Lord, and Your steadfast love; for from forever they have been."

Therefore, from that which you just heard, you may understand that the Church's first call today to remembrance is not to us, but to God. God's Word is proclaimed this day to lead us to recall that this is a day in Lent to call out, in the Faith, to God to remember His mercy and enduring love for sinners. That does not mean the Church believes that He has forgotten His divine attributes. Rather, the faithful calling upon God to display His enduring love and grace reminds them, us, of His desire to continue to pour out His lovingkindness. The movement is from God's remembrance of His mercy and enduring love to our holding fast in our minds and hearts the eternal

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:3a.

truth that He wills to shower us with His gracious gifts. It will be helpful to remember that as we hear the remainder this sermon. Turn now your thoughts and feelings to reflect anew upon God's revealed will, as our theme-setting verse reveals:

This remains the will of the God: the "holification" of all of you...²

That calls us each and all to remember God's declared desire for those who bear His Name. That means that He makes and declares holy those whom He calls into the Faith. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Word of God clearly proclaims that Christians *have been sanctified through the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once...³*

The word we translate, "once," means that our, your, "holification" does not consist of progressing through stages of holiness. You are not being called to follow some methodology that enables you to become gradually more holy, more like God, as you live in the Faith on earth. God reveals His will again today, that you all would be sanctified, declared holy as God is holy. That is all God's work, which He effects through His chosen means of grace. He keeps you in Christ, through His Word, in His Body. His Word and work keeps you in a state of holiness before Him. God, through St. Paul sums us what His "holification" of you means:

For God did not call us for the purpose of uncleanness, but in holiness.⁴

Those who recognize their own sinfulness learn daily to return to His calling. We, in Christ, through the Word of God, remember to continually count on God's mercy and unconditional love which bring to us His blood-bought forgiveness, life and salvation. It is a blessing to hear that it is God's will to declare us, you, to be holy as He is holy. That is proclaimed to lead you into reflecting what sanctification in this life means.⁵ The meaning of that is declared through God's revelation of His will for His people: *the "holification" of all of you*, which the Holy Spirit goes on to describe in such a manner that,

² 1 Thessalonians 4:3a.

³ Hebrews 10:10 New King James Version.

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

⁵ 1 Peter 1:16

all of you continue to hold yourself from the sexual evil; each one of you know to continue to acquire his own vessel in holiness and honor, not in passion (of) strong desires, just as the Gentiles, the ones not knowing God (do); do not exceed proper boundaries and claim more than one's due in the matters of his brother ...⁶

That sounds like a lot of Law. Without God's calling, without His declaring that which comes before it, your "holification," it is all "do and do not." Yet, because of God's remembrance of His mercy and enduring love for you, His naming you "sanctified in Christ" means that you are freed from even the most intimate of sins.

That is that which we call, "person sin." Such trespass against God's word goes to the core of a person. As the Holy Spirit moved St. Paul to describe it elsewhere in the New Testament, such sin is committed by the immoral person. The Word goes on to declare that every other sin is outside the body.⁷

The ancient word for such "person sin," is *Πορνείας* [porneios]. Our common language has derived the first part of the word, "pornography," from that word). *Πορνείας* [Porneios] is used scripturally and civilly to describe all manner of unlawful sexual intercourse. As the word would have been heard by the ancient Christians in the city of Thessalonica, *Πορνείας* [porneios] described that which is revealed to be sin through the Word of God as it was specifically declared through the Old Covenant Scriptures.

Even to the peoples (Gentiles) who were not of the One True Faith, the word, from the 4th century BC onward, was used to describe that which civil law had ruled as illegal. We may learn from their use of the word, *Πορνείας*, [porneios] that ancient pagan Greeks recognized Natural Law. It appears that they were much more advanced in their understanding of reality than our contemporary nations which disregard the truths that have been written on all people's hearts.

As to your hearts, upon which the Holy Spirit has recorded God's will, many of

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:3b-6a.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:18.

you have heard some fine biblical teaching concerning such “person sin,” in recent Bible studies here. There is no need to repeat that which has been taught. Even so, as you remember God who has again willed to proclaim your “holification” today, you are free to remember that the Sixth Commandment, (which is?).... That Holy Command has been explained for centuries as the Word which calls you to lead a life in Christ that is free from sexual evil. In particular, that means that husbands and wives are to cherish and esteem one another. That summary was declared to lead you back into today’s text from the Letter to the Thessalonians, where the Holy Spirit proclaims:

each one of you know to continue to acquire his own vessel in holiness and honor, not in passion (of) strong desires, just as the Gentiles (do), the ones not knowing God...⁸

In your bulletin, the first encouragement in that command just translated, *to acquire his own vessel*, is rendered, *how to control his own body*.⁹ In the context of those translations, the words, *his own vessel* and *his own body* mean, *his own wife*.... It will be helpful to remember that the Word of the Lord elsewhere declares a man and a woman joined by the Holy Spirit through the Word shall become one body. That means that husband and wife become one flesh which no one may separate. Thus God through an earthly and spiritual union, *a threefold cord (which is) not quickly broken*, means that man and wife be joined in holiness and honor.¹⁰

Even so, due to human sinfulness, the temptations of the world, and the wiles of the devil, such a bond may be painfully ripped apart. That is why God, through St. Paul, calls the faithful to hold to the marital union, *not in passion (of) strong desires*. He goes on to say that such is the way of fallen man. Those who do not know God cannot in the Faith call out to God to remember His mercy and steadfast love when they fall prey to the passions of the flesh. They have rejected the Gospel which grants pure

⁸ *1 Thessalonians 4:4-5.*

⁹ *Ibid. English Standard Version.*

¹⁰ *Ecclesiastes 4:12c*

hearts. Instead they follow the desires of man's heart, which is full of all manner of unclean things.¹¹

Yet, you, dear ones in Christ, when you find that you have failed to live to God's declaration of your holiness, even if you commit "person sin," you are free to follow God's desires. You are able, in Christ, to call out to God in the Faith to remember His mercy and steadfast love for you. You may confess your sins, even those of *Πορνείας*, [porneios] and receive the forgiveness He wills to give you in Christ.

Should you have gone from person sin, to sin against your brother, you are still free to return to Christ, confessing your sins. The Apostle does not say that *Πορνείας* [porneios] is an unforgivable sin, nor does it remove one from God's grace and mercy to *exceed proper boundaries and claim more than one's due in the matters of his brother....* If you have done such, whether it has been in thought, word or deed, confess your sins. Will to turn from them. Know that the word declares your freedom to not trespass the marriage bonds of another in the holiness that God has granted.

Believe anew that God's enduring love and grace are for you. Look to the cross. Behold the image of the Savior who shed His blood to cover over all your sins. Hear Him declare anew to you, "Father forgive them," and "It is finished!" He died to present you pure to Him, as part of His blood-washed eternal Bride, the Church.

On the other hand, if such sins you have not committed, but rather someone has trespassed against you, turn again to today's Word. If they have not expressed their sorrow over "person sins" against you or your marriage bonds, remember the Word of God's promise for His faithful people. Remember that God still declares His will toward those who will not turn from their sins, when He says,

*[The] Lord [is] Avenger concerning all these things, just as also we said beforehand to all of you, and solemnly witnessed to [you].*¹²

That is a heavy and harsh reality. It is one, however, that frees you who are

¹¹ cf. *Proverbs* 6:12-15; *Matthew* 15:18-20.

¹² *1 Thessalonians* 4:3-6.

faithful from the burden of pain that comes from dealing with those who are unrepentant. God, Who has declared you right with Him, Who proclaims that you are holy in Christ, will take care of those who remain unholy.

That leads us to one of the purposes of Lent. This season is given to you to remember this truth: if one is not a sinner, one has no need for the Savior Who died to gift the forgiveness of all sin.

On the other hand, the Great Fast of Lent holds forth traditions that you may practice to remind yourself of your sinfulness and your Savior. You surely have heard of fine outward bodily preparations that may lead you from the sin of thinking and believing you are not a sinner. Faithfully recalling Lent's disciplines can be of use to remind you of your true need for Savior. Fasting and other bodily preparations are yours to practice that you may also move away from hard-hearted thoughts about those who continue to sin against you.

Lenten works done in the Faith can lead you again learn to call upon God, to implore Him to remember His gifts of His mercy and enduring love. Such blessings are central to the life of any Christian. May they become especially precious to you as the calendar moves swiftly to the annual remembrance of the Day when God truly remembered His will for you. Then, you are free to continue today's theme and remember that God displayed His mercy and steadfast love for you as He died in your sins to free you from bondage to them!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent II, *Reminiscere* (LSB One-year series)

Introit Psalm 25:1a-2, 6, 2b,22; Genesis 32:22-32; I Thessalonians 4:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28; Psalm 121

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Soli Deo Gloria