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Homiletics: Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on Synodical Conference Gospels

CANTATE

JOHN 11:17-27

The death of the Christian releases him from all sorrow. But it brings sorrow to the bereaved. Where shall the bereaved turn for comfort?

TURNING TO JESUS FOR COMFORT IN THE HOUR OF BEREAVEMENT

I

*The Comfort of Our Fellow Men, Though Good, Is Not Adequate
(Vv. 17-20)*

A. Since the Fall all are subject to death, Rom. 5:12. Even Christians, whose sins are forgiven through faith in Christ, are cut down by the grim reaper. Lazarus, a believer, died, v. 14. Though sin is removed, the consequences remain. Illustration: Drive nails into beautiful table top. Nails can be pulled out, but marks will remain. Though our sins are removed, we are still subject to physical death. Death therefore will invade every home and bring sorrow to every heart, e. g., Mary and Martha.

B. It is customary for our fellow men to come and console us in the hour of bereavement, v. 19. An ancient custom, 2 Sam. 10:2; 1 Chron. 7:22. This is appreciated. It helps to know that others sympathize and understand.

C. But it takes more than human comfort to satisfy, vv. 20, 29. Mary and Martha no doubt appreciated consolations offered by friends, v. 19, but needed a message to heal the wounds and to take the sting out of death. They went to Jesus as soon as they heard of His arrival. We, too, appreciate human comfort (expressions of sympathy, kind things said about the deceased, offers of help), but we need more than that. We and our fellow men are victims of, not victors over, death. We therefore turn in the hour of bereavement to Him who is the Conqueror of death.

II

*The Comfort Which Christ Gives Takes the Sting out of Death
(Vv. 21-27)*

A. He assures us that there is a greater gift than physical life, vv. 21-23. Jesus had not prevented the physical death of Lazarus, though He had been notified of his illness, v. 3. Mary and Martha felt that Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus if He had been present, v. 21. Indeed, He could have, but there is a greater gift than physical life, v. 23. Though He later raised Lazarus, v. 44, Lazarus again went through physical death in order to receive the greater gift, the glory of eternal life. Physical death is the gate into the glory of heaven. Knowing this helps remove the sting of death.

B. He assures us of the resurrection to eternal life, vv. 23-26.

1. There will be a resurrection, vv. 23, 24. The soul rises immediately, Luke 23:43, and the body on the Last Day, John 5:27, 28. Martha, v. 24, and other Old Testament believers knew this, Job 19:25, 26; Ps. 17:15; Dan. 12:2. Let us never forget it.

2. This is possible because of the person and power of Christ, v. 25 a.

a. He is the Resurrection, has power over death by His own right, and did not have to ask for it, v. 22, as ancient prophets, 1 Kings 17:20-22. Is the Resurrection in every sense. He is its Source, John 5:25-27; He is its First Fruits, 1 Cor. 15:23; He will effect it by His own power, John 5:28, 29; and by His salvation alone it will be a blessing, 1 Cor. 15:17-20.

b. He who lives and believes in Christ shall never really die, v. 26. He has the true life as his present possession, John 3:36 a. His death will be a peaceful sleep, from which he shall awake in eternity, 1 Thess. 4:13-18. The soul then will live in unending happiness, and after the resurrection both body and soul shall be free from death and every evil forever, Rev. 7:14-17; 21:4. This takes the sting out of death. We do not grieve when our loved ones fall asleep at night, because we know they will awake in the morning to a new day. We are comforted when our loved ones fall asleep in Christ, for we know they will arise to eternal glory. This helps take the sting out of death.

Conclusion: Jesus Christ is the heaven-sent Redeemer, v.27. He came to abolish death and to bring light and immortality to light through the Gospel. Let us go to Him for comfort in the hour of bereavement. He will give solid, abiding comfort.

Riverside, Calif.

WM. GRAUMANN

ROGATE

JOHN 11:28-45

This is a Sunday of confidence and victory, still in the blessed light of Easter. Introit strikes this note of joyful praise. The Gospel, John 16:23-30, carries it on and gives us the blanket promise of Jesus, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." This victorious confidence should be reflected in all our prayers. Jesus' prayer in our text serves as a model:

FATHER, I THANK THEE THAT THOU HAST HEARD ME!

I

We Can Pray Thus Because in Jesus We See God's Loving Compassion

A. Too often we are tempted to rebel against God's ways because of intense grief and sorrow. The first statement of both Martha and Mary (vv. 21, 32) contains the thought, "Lord, why didn't you come sooner?" Cf. Ps. 73:11-14; Ps. 42:9.

B. Yet we dare never think that any delay in answering our prayer is due to a lack of interest or compassion on God's part. V. 33: When Jesus saw Mary and her comforters weeping, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." Jesus shook Himself—an outward demonstration of inward indignation; not at any unbelief He might have noticed in these Jews, but rather in sincere compassion in seeing what havoc death causes. Heb. 2:14, 15. Cf. also v. 38.

C. "Jesus wept," v. 35 (shortest verse in English Bible). The Greek word used here indicates no loud expression of grief, but rather tears silently pressing their way out and trickling down the cheeks. All those that observed Jesus could see His sincere love and sympathy, v. 36. Rom. 12:15.

D. Jesus knows that His Father has the same loving compassion;

therefore He prays as He does, vv. 41, 42. Consider how beautifully that fits with what Jesus says in today's Standard Gospel, John 16:26, 27.

E. Accordingly, we can pray as Jesus did. In Jesus we see God's compassion. He has loved us with an everlasting love, Jer. 31:3, and proved it by sending Jesus, John 3:16. Paul makes the application, Rom. 8:32. Believing in Jesus as our Savior, we are sure of God's loving compassion, no matter how serious our affliction, Ps. 103:13; Heb. 4:15; Ps. 42:11. Thus an answer to our prayer is assured, Is. 65:24.

II

We Can Pray Thus Because in Jesus We See God's Omnipotence

A. Because God doesn't help when we think He should, unbelievers will try to cause us to doubt that He can help, v. 37; Job 2:9.

B. Because of the immediate grief even Christians begin to think there is no possibility of help, v. 39. Martha suggests Jesus leave the stone on the grave.

C. Jesus, however, proceeds with utmost confidence, v. 34: Jesus' question is really the forward march order to victory; v. 40: Jesus assures Martha that if she believes, she will be sure to see God's glory; vv. 41, 42: Jesus' prayer takes victory for granted, even over man's greatest enemy, death. He even tells His Father that His prayer is a public testimony of His absolute confidence in victory.

D. The omnipotence of God is demonstrated; v. 43: Jesus' command carries in it the life-giving power to raise Lazarus; v. 44: the result is immediate; Lazarus arises.

E. This demonstration was so obvious and certain that many of these eyewitnesses were led to faith, v. 45. That was so often the case, John 2:11; John 4:53. However, Jesus expects faith to be based on His Word and not on demonstrations, John 20:29.

F. In all your prayers, no matter how great the grief and how impossible relief may seem to be, always thank God for hearing you, because you know most certainly He can do it, Luke 1:37; Matt. 17:20.

Concluding thought: Hymn 459:1, 2.

St. Joseph, Mich.

WALTER W. STUENKEL

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

JOHN 17:17-26

The ascension of Christ, commemorated today, did not come unexpectedly. Prophets had long foretold it (Ps. 16:11; 24:7; 68:18; 110:1). Jesus clearly foresaw it (John 14:2, 3). In fact, when the hour of His betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, and death was at hand, and He "lifted up His eyes to heaven" and prayed, He spoke as if it were all done already. It is as though He had already risen from the dead, ascended on high, and had just appeared before His Father's throne. But there He pours out the deep yearning and longing of His soul in the prayer from which our text is taken. His own work was done. The price had been paid in full. Forgiveness had been secured for all. The world stood redeemed. But oh, how much still remained to be done on earth! His spoils had to be gathered. His kingdom had to be established. His flocks had to be brought Home.—His followers were still on earth carrying out the preaching of the Gospel, but everything depended on the success of their labors. His heart goes out to them. And so, in our text, the Ascended Christ becomes

OUR INTERCEDING AND PRAYING ADVOCATE

I

*He Prays for the Safety of His Believers Still on Earth,
Carrying Out His Mission*

A. His heart goes out to His believers, still living in the midst of a hateful and dangerous world, but He needs them there. He does not pray, therefore, to have them taken out of the world, v. 15, but to have them kept from evil. They are His people, His employees, doing His work, v. 17.

B. 1. What comfort and courage should flow from this thought, that high above us our Ascended Lord is thus interceding for us!

2. How safe and secure we are in this evil world, "sanctified," set apart as His people, in His service! V. 19 links our safety with His.

3. How important, on the other hand, that we abide in the truth, to remain thus sanctified—set apart for Him!

II

He Prays for the Success of the Mission of His Believers

A. The joy and happiness of Jesus hangs upon others being won through the testimony of His believers. And so, racing ahead of His emissaries, as it were, He already prays for them "which shall believe" on Him. Note with what assurance we Christians can pursue our mission:

B. 1. Jesus prepares the way for us by His intercessions, v. 20.

2. He visualizes the converts inspired and activated for the cause, v. 21.

3. He binds up the success of it with the glory and oneness of the Holy Trinity. Everything depends on people knowing the Father and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent, vv. 25, 26; v. 3.

III

He Prays for the Eventual Homecoming of His Own to Share in His Glory

Having gone to prepare a place for us, John 14:1-3, need we any higher and greater thing to inspire us and keep us active in His service than this: "Father, I will that they . . . be with Me where I am"? Is there any room for questioning our eventual homecoming, when our Ascended Christ intercedes for us and, praying, assures our heavenly Father with "I will"?

Conclusion: May the thought of Christ's ascension keep our eyes fixed on high, but keep us busy in His service here below. Amen.

Tacoma, Wash.

ARTHUR W. SCHELP

EXAUDI

LUKE 11:5-13

After the inaugural ceremonies on January 20 of this year the press reported that Joseph Lewis of the Freethinkers of America (about 30,000) had strongly criticized the President's personal inaugural prayer as being "wholly uncalled for" and as a reflection on citizens "who do not believe in the efficacy of prayer," adding that "if President Eisenhower expects any results from praying, he will be sadly disappointed."

We on our part are heartened to know that our President

acknowledges his need of divine help, and we hope that he will often go to God in Christian prayer, as all believers should, for we know that:

**PERSEVERANCE IN CHRISTIAN PRAYER HAS CHRIST'S
OWN PROMISE OF REWARD**

I

*Christ Himself Has Promised to Reward Perseverance
in Christian Prayer*

A. The context requires that we think here of Christian prayer.

1. The disciples had asked the Lord to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1 b);

2. In response to their request the Lord not only gave them the "Lord's Prayer" as a model, but taught them also to persevere in this kind of prayer (Luke 11:5-9).

B. With strong asseveration the Lord assures us that perseverance in Christian prayer will be rewarded.

1. He points His promise by an illustration from the lesser to the greater.

a. A friend coming to another friend with a matter of minor importance and at a most inopportune time (v. 5, "at midnight," the doors "being shut to stay shut," perf., *kekleistai*, and the children "in bed"), usually gets his request; if not for friendship's sake, then because of his shamelessness (v. 8, *anaideia*, an impudence which totally disregards another's comfort).

b. How much sooner will the Father with whom time is never inopportune, hear the pressing, persevering, yea, shameless cries of His own dear children (Gal. 4:6; John 17:23; Rom. 8:14-16; 38,39) when they come to Him with their own greater needs as they are expressed in the Lord's Prayer? (Vv. 1-4.)

2. The Lord, with an emphatic personal assurance, repeats His promises to hear.

a. Literally Jesus says: "Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking" (present imperatives, hence reiterative action), and promises six times that such perseverance shall not fail of reward (vv. 9, 10).

NOTE: Perseverance in prayer does not mean to come with "vain repetitions" (*contra* Matt. 6:7), but to keep coming with sincerity with each new need no matter how insignificant it may appear and no matter how shameless we feel about such repeated coming.

b. By stating in the singular also (v. 10) the promises made in the plural (v. 9, *humin*), Jesus indicates that no individual is ever to be excepted from these assurances.

c. Significant also is the strong asseveration with which Jesus introduces these promises when He says, literally, "Besides, I myself—even I—declare unto you" (*kago humin lego*). Lenski, therefore, seeks to retain the full force of Christ's words by the following free rendition: "In addition to this strong illustration (of the friend at midnight), no less a person than I, your Lord (v. 1), make to you, My own disciples, this most positive and assured declaration."

II

Christ Has Also Promised that Perseverance in Christian Prayer Will Be Rewarded According to the Heavenly Father's Love and Wisdom

A. Fathers generally do not make mockery of their children's requests, by giving stones shaped like cakes instead of cakes, or a fishlike serpent in place of a fish (v. 11), or a dead and poisonous scorpion rolled up like an egg in place of an egg (v. 12). How much less will our heavenly Father mock our petitions by giving us useless and harmful gifts in place of that which is good! (1 John 3:1-3; John 16:23, 27; 17:23 b.)

B. Fathers, though inherently corrupt because of sin, know how to give "good things" (*agatha*, beneficial things) to their children (v. 13), how much more the holy Father in heaven!

1. God, our perfect Father (Matt. 5:48), blesses all men however unworthy (Matt. 5:45 ff.), but also promises a special reward to those who persevere in Christian prayer. This is implied by our text (v. 13 a) and is stated in Matt. 7:11; 6:5-14.

2. Jesus declares the most beneficial gift of all, however, to be the Holy Spirit (v. 13 b).

a. This is also the first gift asked for in the Lord's Prayer. (NOTE: Luther's explanation to the first three petitions and the fact that "in some forms of the Lord's Prayer (Marcion, Greg. Nys.) a petition for the gift of the Holy Spirit took the place of the First or Second Petition," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*.)

b. In the Sermon on the Mount the Savior (Matt. 6:33) urges us to seek this gift above all others, since only by the Holy Ghost can we have faith (1 Cor. 12:3 b) and its fruits (Gal. 5:22, 23); and only through a Spirit-wrought faith can we please God (Heb. 11:6) in all we undertake to do (Hebrews 11; Col. 3:17; Gal. 5:16; James 4:1-8).

Conclusion: Surely, with such certain and abundant promises of grace we ought gladly and daily to persevere in Christian prayer. But, alas, how frequently we fail! How poorly we pray! "Forgive us our trespasses," we cry, therefore, with every prayer. However, the emphatic and repeated promises of our text should make us certain that we are heard and that our sins are forgiven; and should inspire us, according to our various gifts and callings (Epistle), to "serve His Majesty" with "a pure heart" (Collect), and to be His witnesses unto the uttermost (Gospel). Amen.

Chicago, Ill.

THEODORE F. NICKEL

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

JOHN 6:60-71

The first Pentecost, with its miraculous and sensational events, was a unique occurrence in history that will not be repeated in just that way again. Pentecost is also a continuous process. Whenever and wherever the Word is proclaimed, there is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is profoundly significant for us today. Therefore

OUR PENTECOST PRAYER: "COME, HOLY SPIRIT"

I

Preserve Us from Unbelief and Offense

A. Context: the feeding of the five thousand, followed by Christ's discourse on the true Bread of Life. Text reports reaction of hearers. "Hard saying." What? Christ, the Bread of Life, the only Source of eternal life. *Sola gratia*. Necessity of faith in Him.

This most of the hearers found offensive and impossible to hear, i. e., accept. Outwardly in circle of disciples, yet unbelievers, 1 Cor. 2:14. Followed their "flesh," their natural reason, pride, self-righteousness. To them the sweetest Gospel was repulsive and intolerable.

B. What a calamity! Loss of eternal salvation. It can't happen to us? The *opinio legis* inheres in all human hearts. Outward circle of disciples today; visible Church. Many take offense at the *solas* of the Gospel and will accept only a diluted "Christianity" that leaves room for reason and pride and works. When, therefore, the unique and exclusive character of Christ's Gospel is made clear, many find this message unbearable; they are offended, they "murmur," they "believe not," they "walk no more with Him"; yes, there are those who "betray Him."

C. Because this is an ever-present danger for us, we can observe this festival of the Holy Spirit in no better way than with the fervent, heartfelt prayer: "O Holy Spirit, Thou Spirit of truth, descend to us, enter our heart, by Thy power preserve us from our flesh, bring to naught the objections of our sin-blinded reason, destroy our natural pride, and annihilate every trace of work-righteousness in us. Cast down every idol throne; reign supreme, and reign alone." For this we rely on the promise of Christ, that His Spirit shall lead us into all truth, John 16:13.

II

Lead Us to Faith and Confession

A. In His loving concern for those who found His Gospel of grace and faith so unpalatable and therefore chose the ruinous road of unbelief, Jesus spoke to them of the ways and means of coming to faith in Him, to spiritual life, issuing in eternal life, v. 63. The Holy Spirit is the "Lord and Giver of life." He alone, by His mysterious yet divinely efficacious operation, stifles the unprofitable flesh and creates the new spiritual life. He removes the natural blindness and glorifies Christ in men, John 16:14, so that they may now behold His glory, "the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," 1:14, and believe in Him. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth."

The Holy Spirit works faith through means of grace: the Word of Christ, in any form of application—general proclamation, private absolution, Baptism, Lord's Supper. Compare the implications of John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 2:8; 10. Text, vv. 68, 69. Note juxtaposition: "Thou hast the words of eternal life"—"and we believe," etc. This faith, this firm conviction of the heart, is followed by the beautiful confession, v. 69.

B. Faith the *sine qua non*. For you and me. Today. III Art., expl. Therefore our earnest petition on this day of Pentecost: "Come, Holy Spirit! Lead us to Jesus, our Savior. Kindle the true faith in us through the Word of Jesus. Strengthen, and preserve our faith."

"Give us the courage of our convictions and bring us to a clear-cut confession." II Art., expl.: "I believe that Jesus Christ . . . is my Lord." "No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. 12:3. See also Rom. 10:9.

C. The work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable. We have no more urgent need. The Father is eager to give us this greatest Gift through His Son. Let us pray for this Gift above all. Luke 11:13. Hymn 231.

Sheboygan, Wis.

H. J. A. BOUMAN

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

MATT. 28:16-20

All religions glorify or worship some God: the Hindu, Brahma; the Moslem, Allah; the Alaskan, the totem pole; the Unitarian, an idol father; the Christian, the Holy Trinity. Men have glorified pigs, cows, ancestors, sun, gold, and hundreds of other things. The Athenians had an altar to "the unknown god."

Religion is of two kinds, that which comes from God and that which comes from man. True religion glorifies the Trinity. False religion may glorify anything or everything (pantheists).

GLORY BE TO THE FATHER AND TO THE SON
AND TO THE HOLY GHOST

(NOTE: This *gloria* was first used in the Apostolic Church to "Christianize" the Psalms. It has same use in our liturgy today.)

I

The Glory That Resides in the Trinity

A. His name is His glory, v. 19.

1. The Father creates us and adopts us as His sons.
2. The Son becomes our Redeemer.
3. The Holy Ghost becomes our Comforter.
4. No one can explain this Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity.
5. All Christians believe it. See Athanasian Creed — "And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity." This doctrine identifies Christianity.

B. His power is His glory, v. 18.

1. He has all power in heaven — power over angels, archangels, Seraphim, and saints. He also has power over evil spirit world.
2. He has all power on earth — power over means of transportation, expansion of commerce, methods of communication, science of language, spread of culture, talents of men, and all things usable to speed the rapid flight of the Gospel.

C. His other attributes are His glory — eternal, omniscient, holy, full of grace, etc.

II

The Glory That We Give to the Trinity

A. Our worship glorifies Him, v. 17.

1. He commands our worship.
2. Our morning worship begins "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost." It ends with the Aaronic benediction, using "Lord" thrice.
3. Our worship says "Thank You." It demonstrates utter reliance upon Him. It seeks His favor.
4. Our new church buildings are dedicated "To the glory of God the Father," etc. See dedication booklets.
5. Our worship is God-centered, not man-centered, as in Modernism and other false religions.
6. When "some doubted," the glory of the worship was marred.

B. Our obedience glorifies Him, vv. 19, 20 a.

1. "Go" is better translated "having gone." Jesus takes it for granted that Christians will go everywhere with the truth.
2. "Therefore" — because of His power and to His glory.
3. "Teach" is an unfortunate translation. R. S. V. has corrected it to "make disciples." The method of making disciples is prescribed.
 - a. Baptize in the name of the Trinity. No other name has the power to bring faith and salvation through Baptism.
 - b. Teach the whole counsel of God, not part of it.
4. The disciples faithfully carried out this great commission. It was probably given to the "above 500" mentioned by Paul 1 Cor. 15:6. They filled their world with the Gospel, in spite of hardship.
5. This commission is still in force. We use every modern means to fulfill it — attractive churches, radio, television, billboards, printing presses, etc. Modern communication and travel lightens the burden of those who go to "all nations."
6. What glory to God if Apostolic zeal is coupled with twentieth-century methods!
7. Building and maintaining Christian schools for every age level is part of our obedience to this command.

C. Our trust in His presence glorifies Him, v. 20 b.

1. First disciples were fearful. They needed the assurance of Jesus' presence.
2. We need it, too. It redounds to His glory that we are utterly and totally dependent upon Him for strength and means to do His will.
3. "Even unto the end of the world" is an extra promise that His presence extends to our generation.

Conclusion: Does your life, your witness, your personality, your possession, your time, and everything about you sing, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost"?

Baltimore, Md.

GEORGE H. SOMMERMEYER