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Homiletics: Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels, Second Series

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

JOHN 10:17-21

Good Shepherd Sunday. That Christ is the Good Shepherd reminds us that He fosters, feeds, and leads. But it reminds us also that we trust and follow; to speak literally instead of figuratively, that we have faith in Him as our Redeemer and Lord. This text, following immediately upon the Gospel for the day, helps to build and preserve in us that trust in Christ.

We Can Trust Jesus Christ

I. Jesus Christ does the work given Him by the Father

A. Our trust in Jesus is not just in general. But we trust Him as One sent by God, God's Son, to carry out a task which God has given Him. Jesus "is known" of His followers as the One who does the Father's work. (Text v.17; cf. v.14)

B. Mistrust in Jesus isn't merely that our faith is "weak" in general, but that we fail to cling to Him as the One who does the task for which the Father sent Him. Every other faith is bound to get weak. Jesus the Wonder-Worker becomes suspect when He stops working or when He hangs on the cross (Mark 15:29-32; text, vv. 19-21). The present wave of religiosity and esteem of Jesus may be expected to give way to a cycle of skepticism and antagonism in coming years.

C. The work given Him by the Father is to give people "life," i.e., the life of God in the heart (John 10:10; 17:3). This involves the Shepherd's work of finding those who have lost this life and putting them together

in the one "fold" or assembly of God, the company of the saved and of the believers in God and His Christ. Note Paul's picture Eph. 2:5,6.

D. Jesus was tempted by Satan to gather people by means other than God outlined to Him, to impress them with wonders, or to subdue them by force (Matt. 4:1-11). But He conquered the temptation and went on to carry out the Father's plan. (Cf. John 18:36,37)

II. Jesus Christ dies in order to do this work

A. Suppose we have this straight: Jesus Christ came into the world to carry out God's plan, to draw God's people together after Him. Don't we still have our troubles in believing in Him? Isn't it all imaginary and mysterious, how He works, how He gathers and leads His people? How can we find the will to follow Him and rely on Him completely, especially in an age that believes only in what it can see?

B. The answer: To carry out the job that God gave Him to do Jesus had to die. They could tell that already in the Old Testament (Is. 53). Hence Jesus makes so much of it in our text and in the Good Shepherd concept. He lays down His life, and He does it on purpose, as part of His obedience to God and the fulfilling of God's plan. (Text vv. 17, 18; cf. v. 11; Phil. 2:8)

C. Why should it be necessary that Jesus, the inoffensive and pure One, the Son of God and Healer and Helper, should die? This side of the grave we can probably never fathom the whole fact (Rom. 11:33 ff.). But Jesus ties His death up inextricably with His shepherding (John 10:11,15). It is pre-

cisely in His dying that He carries out the Father's plan (v. 15). Part of the answer lies in the fact that this death is *for* us. By Baptism we become shareholders in that death, and our own sins and our death are vanquished. (Rom. 6:3, 4; 3:23-25)

D. And let's be glad that God planned His way of life for us that way, for thus God could declare His redeeming love to us and speak to us with a Word of forgiveness that draws us from unbelief to faith and sustains us in faith in the Good Shepherd (Rom. 3:25, 26; John 12:32). Even Christ's resurrection becomes God's message that the death of Jesus of Nazareth was the death of the Good Shepherd. (Cf. 1 Peter 1 and 2)

Conclusion.—You aren't sure whether you can follow the Good Shepherd in faith? Look where He tells you to look—at the work which He completed for the Father by dying for the sins of the world. Listen to your fellow Christians tell it to you, too, in the Sacrament (1 Cor. 11:26). And when you do you will find your faith growing, and the members of this church will be more completely fixed in the one fold.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

St. Louis, Mo.

JUBILATE

JOHN 11:1-16

Sorrow is a frequent visitor in the lives of us all. Sickness, death, accidents, broken friendships, financial loss, etc. God does not promise that sorrow will be kept from us, but does promise that we shall have strength to bear it. We need to know how to handle sorrow and grief. We have come through a season of witnessing sorrow turned to joy. . . . Good Friday to Easter. . . . Today's Gospel prepares for the Ascension. . . . We need conviction that God uses sorrow to strengthen and to benefit us. By His power it can be changed into joy.

What to Do When Sorrow Comes

I. *Pray to God* (v. 3)

Setting is well known. Note the concern of Mary and Martha. They sent word to Jesus. Prayer is necessarily a recognition of our inability and God's ability, our need and God's power. In illness, especially, we recognize our inadequacy to do anything by ourselves. Prayer seems to become more meaningful on this account.

II. *Trust God's love*

A. Prayer is offered on the grounds of God's love (v. 4). Alienation from God because of sin precludes true prayer. God's love takes initiative to invite and offer. Luther's explanation to Introduction of Lord's Prayer. Mary and Martha plead on basis of God's love for Lazarus, not on basis of their or his love to God. "Lord, he whom Thou lovest," not "Lord, he whom we love," or "Lord, he who loves You." Because God loves us all things will be well.

B. God assures us of His love by word (v. 5). Nothing is said so often in Scripture. God so loved the world. . . . By grace are ye saved. . . . Children learn it from cradle up, "Jesus loves me, this I know." We need these words, even as a sweetheart needs the assurance from her lover by word. Especially when actions of God are mysteries we need this word and assurance of love.

C. God demonstrates His love (vv. 7, 8). Jesus goes to Bethany at great personal risk. Disciples convinced that it would be the end. They were ready to go along to die with Him. "Greater love hath no man." He loves not only in word but also in deed. Disciples tried to stop Him on other occasions, and He regarded this as satanic influence (Matt. 16:23). Love is relentless, bold, and courageous.

III. *Trust God's promises*

A. We trust a promise today (v. 4). No miracles or signs are in evidence. Simply

words—"All things work together for good." "There shall no evil befall Thee." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give. . . ." "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared. . . ." The messenger took back a promise that this death was to serve ultimate purpose of life—to glorify God.

B. God's promises are fulfilled in His own time—Jesus Christ Himself is the Evidence. His coming (Gal. 4:4), His life (John 2:4), death (Matt. 16:21 ff.), and resurrection. His promise to come again remains. Time seems so long. Even here He delayed two days (v. 6). It took a lot of trust when such delay was evident. And Lazarus got worse. Physical death set in. Seeing is believing. How easy to think God has deserted us. How hard it is to get God's perspective of time—and of purpose. But we have His promise, and our times are in His hands.

IV. *Trust God's power!*

Quite evident that the disciples were unable to do this (vv. 12-16). Jesus reassures them that everything is in His hand and control (v. 9). Evident that Mary and Martha were not prepared for His actions either. God's Spirit alone can bring us to a full trust in God; so we pray for the Spirit to fill our lives that we may be filled with the power of God. God may reduce us to such a point that *only* His power can be credited for what takes place. Only then will we believe. (Vv. 14, 15)

Conclusion.—We are not to sorrow as others which have no hope. God has equipped us to see purpose in sorrow and to benefit from it rather than be crushed by it. Resurrection is our great hope in every sorrow, not only in bereavement. The loving promises of God and His power to fulfill them in His time turn sorrow into joy. Pray, trust, and wait, that you may be strengthened.

Wheat Ridge, Colo. EDWARD MAY

CANTATE

JOHN 11:17-27

This is clearly a pericope [cut-out section] in a *lectio continua*—almost a serial sermon: Hurry back and see what happens next week. Will Jesus get to Bethany before Lazarus dies? What will Mary and Martha say when, to quote a modern dramatist, "God is late"? In the face of death do they have Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* or a founded hope? What will Jesus do about His dead friend? Be sure to come. Don't miss a single episode.

This is not so facetious as it may sound, for there are three distinct episodes in the narrative. Nor does John neglect the full dramatic development of suspense. This actually involves more of the "poise of faith" than that of a well-remembered Bible story with a happy ending.

So in our pericope for today we dare say no more than can be said in this poise of faith. It is not fair to turn to the end of the chapter to see how it comes out. Lazarus is dead. And Jesus raises no false hopes while testing the faith of Martha. She gives the answer we each must give when faced by death in the family circle, that of faith and hope in the resurrection. Hers is a pre-Easter confession of faith. Ours is post-Easter.

One other note in today's sermon preparation: It is Cantate Sunday—Sing unto the Lord a new song. The Old Testament Lesson proclaims that "God is my Salvation, I shall not be afraid." The Epistle reminds us that "God has brought us forth by the Word of truth." In the Gospel Jesus tells His disciples in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday that He is going away, but will send them the Spirit of truth. Each is a statement of founded hope, and Easter Christians may sing the new song of hope fulfilled.

The Foundation of Hope

I. *Our sympathies (17-20)*

A. Jesus came to Bethany four days after Lazarus was buried. Summoned when Lazarus was in a critical condition, but still alive, Jesus deliberately procrastinated two days. The message of Mary and Martha was a scarcely veiled plea for help: "He whom You love is ill." But Jesus had dismissed the illness as "not unto death." It was somehow to serve the glory of God and of God's Son.

How could He fail to meet the emergency? What kind of friend was He, anyway? Did He really care about Lazarus? What was so important as to keep Him away? The disciples suspected that it was too dangerous for Him to return to Judea, what with the Jews ready to stone Him. But that only suggests the worst of all motives—cowardice. And what were the sisters to think? What would we say about a pastor who ignored an urgent sick call? What would we think of a "friend" who ignored a special phone call at the last hour, or who did not even arrive in time for a funeral? What possible excuse could anyone offer? Cynical moderns say that "God is late," or "God is dead," or, "There's no use to call to heaven for help, for there will be no answer." A humanistic existentialism simply tells us that we shall have to muddle through on our own. In any case, God will not help us. If Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, He seems here to substantiate the modern thesis that "God doesn't care." Now it is obviously too late. Lazarus is dead and buried. The only thing that is left is words. And words are empty after action has been grossly neglected.

B. Bethany was only two miles from Jerusalem. Many friends streamed out to the house to "pay their last respects" and to offer their condolences to the survivors. What did they say? What could they say? What do we all say? "He's better off now. Out of this vale of tears." But he liked this vale of tears. He did not want to die. "You have our sympathies." Yes, and we are grateful. But your sympathies cannot replace a loved one. "Trust in God. He cares for you. It's all for the best. God's ways are always right." Yes, I believe it, but I do not understand it. Doesn't God also know we love our brother and need him? He was at least a man around the house. Now we are no better than widows. Who will really care about us when sympathy runs out? "We'll all meet in Abraham's bosom, in heaven." Yes, but right now

we have to live on earth. Is there really any use? Should we shun the world, forsake it, or plunge into it? There was one who *could* have helped. It did not have to happen. He helped others, even strangers. But He failed to help His dearest and most loyal friends. Before you label this as blasphemous, tell me if this is not the very reaction, spoken or suppressed, of many Christians today when a loved one is taken from them. Has no sincere Christian ever asked, "Why?" Has no Christian in such a crisis suddenly wavered between faith and doubt? Do not we Christians sometimes feel entitled to some "special protection" because of our faith? Do we never feel that sometimes God is unfair to us and too merciful to unappreciative sinners? Consolation, sympathy, words. But Lazarus is dead. And no words will bring him back now. And, friend of mine, "Man does not live by words alone."

II. *A painful interview (20-27)*

A. Martha heard that Jesus was coming. She went to meet Him. Why? Was she still hopeful? Did she wish to avoid a scene in front of a disappointed and crushed Mary? Did she want to act as a buffer between Him and all questioners? Did she want to be the first to know why He had ignored them? Mary stayed home. Why? She had always been glad to sit and listen to Jesus. Was it because she was in such deep mourning that she could not muster the physical and emotional energy to go to meet Jesus? Or did she dread the interview, not knowing how to ask or to avoid the unspoken rebuke? What would you have done? Gone out to meet Him or waited till He came to you?

B. Martha's statement was a masterful combination of gentle rebuke and of faith. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She did not presume to ask Him why He delayed. Nor did she lose faith, even in this extremity.

C. She even dared this tentative hope:

"And even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." He had raised people from the dead before. She knew of Jairus' daughter and of the widow's son at Nain. Who did not? A tactless Martha of only a few months ago had now been transformed into the soul of tact. She did not presume to suggest that Jesus should raise her brother (as Jesus' own mother had on occasion presumed too much upon her relationship to Him). She was prepared for a decision either way. She had reconciled herself to Lazarus' death, and would not permit a slight flicker of hope to become a false hope. The decision was entirely Christ's. Don't you see countless numbed mourners looking upon the fresh corpse of a loved one and sometimes half-expecting to see him breathe again? In the funeral parlor he looks so lifelike. God *could* make him alive again. Oh, how this wish aches inside. No one dares to speak it out loud. But then comes the funeral. The casket is lowered into the open pit. It is covered with earth. Now all hopes are gone. The illusion of life is sealed till Judgment Day. No eyelids flickered, no mouth moved, no muscles twitched. He is now irreversibly dead. All illusions are shattered, and one must return to the reality of a world and life minus a familiar face. And somehow one must pick up the pieces and go on. "Yet, even now. . . . But that is too foolish. One must not suggest the impossible. Possible, yes! But only theoretically. Such wishes do not come true. The dead do not rise from graves. For death is final, and death cancels all."

D. Jesus said to her: "Your brother will rise again." A committal—non-committal statement. Is this a repetition of the universal hope, or is it an enigmatic special hope which will preview the general resurrection? He does not say.

E. Martha plays it safe. She has learned to steel herself against disappointment by not hoping for too much—as we all must. It is

the tempering of dream by reality. What is possible is by no means probable. Hope is deferred. Final vindication, yes. But for now we wait for our hope with patience which resists despair. "I know that He will rise again in the resurrection at the Last Day." This is no mere mouthing of orthodox doctrine to console herself with a right answer. It is now a vital strand in her fabric of hope. She was in no mood for a philosophic discussion about death and immortality. Her thought was that of simple hope in the promises of God. She knew that one day Lazarus would get up out of the grave. But that day was a long, long way off. She would be dead herself by then. This ultimate hope invalidated all deaths and losses now and removed their sting. It validated the life of faith, for faith does not exist apart from hope. Albert Camus had to be content with "the absurdity of life." But Martha of Bethany had a founded hope in the Word of God. And she *knew* Jesus.

F. Jesus then said to her: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Thus Life is centered in God, who is centered in the person of Christ. Life is not an abstraction, some elusive force, some chemical compound, but it is Personality creating personality and personhood. All vitality and life seems to have purposeful movement, including even that of atomic movement, according to Karl Heim. God is the Author and Giver of life. He is Life itself. To resurrect and revivify simply means to give life again. The three forms of birth are created by God: physical, spiritual, and resurrection. None of them is self-induced. To know God is to have eternal life (John 17). To know God in Christ is to know Life itself as the Creator, Redeemer, and Renewer of our life. Thus we do not wait for *something* to happen in the Resurrection, but for *Someone* to happen. The return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are correlative events. The one won't happen without the other. Therefore Jesus

tells Martha: "Whoever believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." This is a statement of fact on the part of Him who knows.

G. "Do you believe this?" He now calls for her personal faith. For now the resurrection is not some future event only far off in time, but present before Martha in the person of Christ. To believe in the resurrection of the dead now must simultaneously mean faith in Jesus Christ as our Life and Hope.

H. Martha answers: "Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, He who is coming into the world."

III. *The posture of faith*

A. This is as far as our text goes for today. Though there is a happy ending to the story, what Jesus said would have been just as true had He not raised Lazarus from the dead. Knowing the ending, we have a tendency to read it back into the plot. But in so doing we lose the posture of faith in which Martha had to stand at that precise moment. And we might tend to lose it for ourselves. For we stand where Martha stood, full of faith, seeing our hope afar off, but not having grasped it as yet. We live by the Word and promise of God. Jesus raises no Lazaruses for us. There are no miracles on the way to the cemetery. We know that there could be, but we do not expect any. Our hope must be directed toward the resurrection at the Last Day.

B. But this is a founded hope. For we have the words and promises of God. We have God's manifestation in Jesus Christ. We know that this same Jesus who claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life was dead and buried just a few days after this incident. We know that He died to redeem us from death, to atone for our sins, and to make it possible for us to be born again of water and the Spirit, to have a new life which transcends

the power of temporal death. Above all, we know that Christ rose from the dead on Easter and said, "Because I live, you shall live also." His words were not vain and empty. For God's Word is action and accomplishment. For we have not only God's promises, but the person of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

C. Therefore we can repeat His promises in faith at every funeral in the face of obvious death. And therefore we can sing a new song of Easter to God on this Cantate Sunday, for He has done marvelous things.

Oberlin, Ohio

WAYNE SAFFEN

ROGATE

JOHN 11:28-45

(The text may be read as the Gospel for the day, and only vv. 40-45 need be read again in the pulpit.)

"Reverend, may I come in and see you about a personal problem? I just have to speak to someone. I seem to be constantly on edge. My husband says I am a bundle of nerves. The children irritate me, and I yell at them. I know this is not right, and I have prayed about it, but it seems that my prayers do no good." Not an isolated instance. Many wonder about the effectiveness of prayer. Rogate Sunday affords a splendid opportunity to consider the problem.

Praying Effectually

1. *How it is hindered*

By *unbelief* of varying degrees, including weakness and smallness of faith.

A. Unbelief tends to be *morbid* (v.31). The Jews in Mary's house conclude that Mary hastily departs to weep at the grave. They let their minds dwell on the grief rather than on the joy of possible help in Christ.

B. Unbelief is *pessimistic* (v.32). Mary focuses her attention on regret over what might have been, as though everything were

now forever lost, instead of on the joy over the prospect of what might yet be. Cf. the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:17-26), whose minds dwelt only on the death of Jesus, and thus they were blinded to the living Lord, who walked with them.

C. Unbelief is *perplexed* with God's timetable (v.37) and jumps to the conclusion that God either cannot help or does not care enough to help. Cf. Gideon: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (Judg. 6:13)

D. Unbelief is *critical* of God's ways of doing things (v.39). Martha protests the opening of the tomb, for fear of an offensive scene.

Such a state of mind is the greatest hindrance to effectual praying. "Blind unbelief is sure to err" (Hymn 514:6). Even the almighty God is seriously hampered by man's unbelief. Cf. Matt. 13:58, "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

II. *What is essential*

Faith, the conviction that for the sake of Christ and His merits we have the privilege of bringing our wants before God and that He will hear and answer our prayers. This is the essence of praying in the name of Christ. (John 16:23)

A. Confidence in the *presence* of Christ (vv. 28, 29). Hope began to rise when Martha told her sister, "The Master is come and calleth for thee." Mary arises quickly and goes to Him. We cannot have confidence in a "distant" God. He assures us, "Am I a God at hand, and not a God afar off?" (Jer. 23:23,24)

B. Confidence in His *love and concern for mankind* (vv.33-36). Jesus was troubled when He saw the grief of Mary and of the Jews who were with her. He is troubled when He sees death as the awful wages of sin. He is determined to conquer this enemy

for us, even though it would cost Him His life (Heb. 2:14,15). Jesus Himself weeps. He goes to the tomb, and in His tears even the Jews detect His love. This conviction is one of the most powerful incentives to bring our troubles to Him. Heb 4:15: "For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are."

C. Confidence in His *power to help* (v.43). Jesus speaks the word, and through the power of His word the dead one is raised. A scoffer was once jeering a humble Christian for his simple faith in this miracle by asking: "If Lazarus was really dead, why did Jesus call him by name, since in that case Lazarus could not have heard Him anyway?" The humble Christian replied: "If Christ had not specified Lazarus, the whole cemetery would have come to life."

D. Conviction of Christ's *desire to save all men* (vv. 41, 42, and 45). Christ prays to His heavenly Father; He purposely makes a public confession of His faith in the Father's answer so that the hearers might believe. The glorious result of God's answer to Christ's prayer is the conversion of many of those present. We pray more intelligently when we keep in mind this purpose of Christ and also remember how Christ accomplished the salvation of mankind (2 Cor. 5:14,15). We understand that He came to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)

E. Conviction that in the end *His ways are always best* and will lead to glory (vv. 40, 41, 44, 45). Christ directly promised that if Martha would believe she would also witness the glory of God. He proceeded to do it His way. The glorious results? Lazarus is raised. Many believe. "Beloved, it is well! God's ways are always right." (Hymn 519:1)

Our first prayer, if we would pray effectually, must be: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9:24)

Milwaukee, Wis. HERBERT BERNER

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

JOHN 17:17-26

That first Ascension Day was a day of dedication. It was the day when Christ dedicated His church to the great purpose for which He had built it. However, the church which Christ dedicated on this occasion was *not* a building made of brick and steel and glass. Rather it was a living temple, composed of people. It was the group of followers He had gathered from the unbelieving world.

He had labored long and hard to build His church. No effort or expense was spared to bring it into being. And now, in one sense, it was complete. He had saved men from sin by His sacrificial death. He had united some of them into a single spiritual structure built upon Himself. True, the church did not go into full operation until 10 days later, on Pentecost, when His Spirit supplied power from above. Furthermore, in the years ahead great new sections were added to the church. However, at this point the first working unit was complete, and before He ascended Christ dedicated it. He set it apart for a special purpose, and He commanded His followers to be true to that purpose.

Today, as we commemorate the Ascension, we should measure ourselves by His command. We should examine that part of the church to which we belong and see how well we are living up to our purpose. The text, spoken by Christ on the night before He died, is an excellent guide. It can help us make this, in the fullest sense of the term,

A Day of Dedication

I. *Christ dedicated Himself to the task of building the church*

A. Christ was sent into the world to gain us for God, to make us His own people (vv. 17-19). *Sanctify* means "to set apart for God." He came from the Father to sal-

vage us from the corruption and disobedience of this world, to purify us, and to dedicate us, as the living temple of God. He gladly and enthusiastically devoted Himself to this cause ("I sanctify Myself"). His entire life and ministry here on earth was directed to this end.

B. His dedication came to a climax when He offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. In its ritualistic meaning *sanctify* means "to designate a victim as an offering to God." Christ became our Substitute and Sin-Bearer. He answered to divine judgment for all humanity's sin. Thus He made it possible for us to be purified and made worthy to belong to God and His church.

C. Through His Word He has reached into our lives and set us apart for God (v. 17). The cleansing pardon for which He died is sent down through time and applied to each individual in the message of the Gospel as well as in the sacraments. One by one we have been saved and scourged clean and added to His living temple. We have been dedicated into His church.

II. *Our purpose in the church is to make Christ known through our unity and the proclamation of His Word*

A. He has built His church and dedicated it for a very specific purpose—that of making Himself known to the world (vv. 21, 23). We are to bring to faith those who are still ignorant or doubting.

B. It is through the proclamation of His Word that we accomplish this. We who were brought into the church through the Word use that same Word in order to bring others in (v. 20). Our witness to His atoning sacrifice extends that sacrifice to others. It is the continuation of His church-building project.

C. The background from which this Word is sounded should be a warm and winsome unity. The effectiveness of the Word will

often depend upon this unity. Members of the church should be very obviously united, both with their Lord and with one another (vv.21-23). This unity is both the demonstration and the recommendation of the Word. It is the manifestation of God at work in our lives. (V.22)

III. *The church needs to be rededicated again and again*

A. The church is repeatedly defiled and defaced. In some cases whole groups of Christians lose hold of the Word and truth of God or lose sight of their purpose. In other cases vicious battles and bitter competition are carried on between disagreeing segments of the church. Congregations can easily be distracted from their purpose by programs of plant expansion or social activity. Individual members frequently detach themselves from the work of proclaiming the Word and leave it to the professionals. Or they destroy the peace and unity of the church with their personal stubbornness or selfishness. All such sins mar the beauty of the church, weaken her witness to the world, and damage her support.

B. On Ascension Day, both as individual members and as a congregation, we ought to face and confess our failures. We ought to look squarely at the damage we have done and then seek help and guidance from the Master Builder. Right now we should draw heavily upon His mercy and His Spirit. With His love and blessing He will rebuild us. He is as ready to repair His church as He was to build it in the first place. And as we accept His transforming love this day, we should rededicate ourselves as His temple and reconsecrate ourselves to His purpose. Since the forces of sin and decay will always be with us in this world, we must continue with this program of rebuilding and rededication.

Conclusion. We have no cause to despair over the imperfect condition of the church or to be depressed by the ongoing weak-

nesses and failures. As we struggle with these factors we are heartened and inspired by the vision of the church in glory (vv.24-26). Especially on this day, when we think of Christ returning to the fullness of His heavenly splendor, we are reminded that someday we, too, together with all believers, will have a great Ascension Day.

St. Louis, Mo. MILTON L. RUDNICK

EXAUDI

LUKE 11:5-13

We are standing between "the Ascension of Our Lord" and "Whitsunday, the Feast of Pentecost." In this relationship v. 13 provides us with the key as to how we can "tie in" this text on prayer with the church year. V. 13 reminds us that we are to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we compare our life with the kind of life that God would have us live, we find that we lack spiritual vitality and stature. We are not so zealous in confessing Christ as the early Christians were. The reason for our weaknesses is not due to a lack of God's promises. God has promised blessings, particularly spiritual blessings, to those who are persistent in prayer. We lack spiritual power and vitality because we have not learned how to ask for the spiritual life God has promised to give us in Christ Jesus. Our text reminds us that we are to be persistent and insistent in our prayers for God's spiritual gifts. Our text also indicates that the greatest spiritual gift we can and should ask for is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Christians Should Be Persistent in Their Prayers, Particularly in Their Prayers for Spiritual Gifts

I. *Jesus taught His disciples to pray*

A. Christians need to pray. The word "evil" in v. 13 reminds us we are fallen creatures. We are still in this world. Even though we are God's "new creatures" through

faith in Jesus Christ, we need bring ourselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit, into ever greater conformity with God's kind of life.

B. The Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4) is Christ's model prayer. In this prayer Christ suggests to us a pattern and method for directing our thoughts and prayers toward our heavenly Father.

C. The Lord's Prayer emphasizes the Christian's need to pray for spiritual gifts. Even the petition "Give us day by day our daily bread" (v.3) can be understood in terms of asking for spiritual gifts, e.g., thankfulness.

D. Jesus teaches us that the greatest spiritual gift is the gift of the Holy Ghost (v.13). "But when the Comforter is come . . . He shall testify of Me" (John 15:26). "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13); "He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

II. *Christians are to be persistent in their prayers for spiritual gifts*

A. Jesus teaches us that prayer involves persistence and importunity when it comes to praying for spiritual blessings (vv. 5-9). Physical and material blessings must be prayed for conditionally (" . . . not My will, but Thine, be done," Luke 22:42). Spiritual blessings and gifts can be demanded from God because of what Christ accomplished for us through His sacrifice on the cross.

B. Jesus teaches us that persistent and proper prayer requires effort and exertion. "Ask," "seek," "knock." (V.9)

III. *God will answer all proper prayers*

A. Christ promised this: ". . . it shall be given you; . . . ye shall find; . . . it shall be opened unto you." (V.9)

B. The Father has indicated this by His love in Christ Jesus. The friend in Jesus' parable (vv. 5-8) gave assistance to his importuning neighbor to "get rid of him." The motives of the man in the house were not the best, for he acted out of selfishness. God gave us the gift of His love, life and forgiveness through His Son Jesus Christ, to win us back to Himself. Our gracious God will certainly continue to grant His own all necessary spiritual and physical blessings through His Son, who returned into heaven on Ascension Day after He had satisfactorily fulfilled God's plan of salvation for mankind.

C. The Father will continue to send the Holy Spirit. Human fathers (parents) are, on the whole, interested in the health and well-being of their children (vv. 11-13). Fathers do not willfully harm their sons and daughters. Human fathers, though subject to sin and temptation ("evil," as opposed to the holiness and goodness of God), know how to provide for their own. Human beings make mistakes. God does not. Our holy and loving God will most certainly continue to send the Holy Spirit to His own to maintain and sustain them in spiritual health and well-being.

D. The Holy Spirit will work God's life in us through the means of grace. (1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:5; Phil. 1:6)

As we learn to pray properly and persistently, God will continue to pour out upon us all gifts and blessings that are necessary to maintain us in His kind of life in and through Christ Jesus.

"O gracious Father, send us Thy Holy Spirit! Holy Spirit, come! For Jesus' sake! Amen."

(For sermon studies on Luke 11:5-13 and Luke 11:1-13 cp. *CTM*, XXIV [April 1953], 288—91, and XXVI [April 1955], 284 to 287, respectively.)

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