

11-1-1960

Homiletics: Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series

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Recommended Citation

Hohenstein, Herbert E. (1960) "Homiletics: Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels Second Series," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 31, Article 79.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol31/iss1/79>

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HOMILETICS

Outlines on the Synodical Conference Gospels, Second Series

By HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MAL. 4:1-3

You know, of course, that all history is headed for one climactic day. And on the basis of this Scripture passage we exclaim

What a Day It Will Be!

I. A day of destruction for the wicked (v. 1)

A. This destruction will be upon the "arrogant": people inflated with an exaggerated appreciation of themselves and their own holiness and accomplishments; people who brazenly, defiantly flaunt God's laws and then dare Him to punish; people who have the worst guilt of all, the sin of thinking they are not sinners, at least not as big and as bad as others they know and read about.

B. This destruction will be upon "evildoers." Isn't that precisely what we've done plenty of—evil? A day to dread, this coming day. But the only damning evil is to fail to cling to Christ as your only Deliverer from the Last Day's destruction. On that day the wicked will shout in agony: "Mountains and hills, cover us!"

C. This will be a day of burning like an oven (v. 1). Literal? Why not! Atomic-hydrogen bomb war. Man started his self-destruction by sin. Could finish it. At any rate, a day of untold agony for the wicked!

D. This destruction will be complete ("neither root nor branch," v. 1). This is a terrible thing. With the ax of His wrath, God will once for all cut down the tree of evil and evil men. In fact, He won't just cut down the tree, He'll also tear up all the roots.

II. A day of deliverance for the righteous

A. They certainly need it.

1. This is what people of Malachi's day

said (3:13, 14). They served God, yet were still in the heat of suffering. Being faithful to God did not appear to be a paying proposition.

2. Do you feel that way at times? Holy, faithful, churchgoing, you suffer while a no-good scoundrel larks and breezes his way through life. It doesn't pay to serve God. Of course it doesn't! Paul says it's sheer insanity to think so (1 Tim. 6:5). Besides, God doesn't pay; He only gives. Sin is the only payer (Rom. 6:23), only one from whom we can demand anything. And sin's only debt to you is your own death. God only gives—the free gift of eternal life. (Rom. 6:23)

3. Still there is a legitimate concern here. Suffering saints ask: "O Lord, will the scales ever balance out? Will there be a day when the tables are turned and your saints will be distinguished not by their crosses but by their crowns?" To that question, our text shouts a firm yes.

B. And what a day it will be! (3:16-18; 4:2, 3). These words tell us the following:

1. You're in God's book of remembrance (3:16). God can't forget about you.

2. You will be spared (3:17). You will be spared only because God spared not Christ, His only Son, but delivered Him up for you so you might be spared on the Last Day!

3. You will be illumined by the sun of righteousness (4:2). Christ is the Beginning, the Dawn, the "Dayspring" of this eternal day. He is the first faint but sure Glimmer of light that for every saint heralds and assures the dawn of this bright day of deliverance from evil and pain. In Jesus' wings there is healing. His wings, His hands,

so often healed sick, infirm men. His "wings" were nailed to the cross that we might be healed with God's pardon from dread disease of all our sins.

4. You'll come out of your caves (v. 2). Imagine the friskiness, the sheer joy of a calf or colt which has been cooped up in the barn all winter and then is turned out to pasture for the first time on a fresh and bright spring day! How that animal runs and leaps and cavorts in sheer ecstatic joy! That's the way you will feel; that's the friskiness, the bubbling-over gladness you'll have; that's the way you'll run and leap for sheer delight on the day God lets you out to pasture—that day when God's righteous sun will disperse forever the dark night of sorrow in your life. Then you'll come out of the caves of pain and sin—yes, even the gloomy cave of death. It must be! For Christ came back from His "cave" on Easter! What a day it will be!

5. You'll tread down the wicked (v. 3). This refers perhaps to a vindication of God's saints. Then it will be manifest who is and who is not God's own. Now you can't tell because wicked seem often more fortunate than the righteous. Not so on the Last Day. Tables will be turned—eternally. Righteous will have victory over their perpetual enemies of sin, death, and pain. How these foes vex and torment us now! How they always seem to win out over us! On Last Day, tables will be turned. We won't be footstools any longer; sin, pain, and death will. What a day it will be!

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Is. 40:1-8

What's this we hear this morning? Why it's

A Voice from the Desert

I. To whom does it belong?

A. Not identified in the text. It could be Isaiah. The New Testament makes it clear

that this desert voice belongs to John the Baptist.

B. And what a man he was! Jesus once called him the greatest born of women, greater even than David or Moses or Elijah. And why was he so great?

1. Because he wasn't a reed. John was a man who had the courage of his convictions. In fact, he literally lost his head over them. He was not a reed blown this way and that by every wind of people's ideas and words. He was a rock, firm in what he believed. Are you like that? Are you a reed or a rock?

2. Because he knew how to deny himself. John was a man who had the courage to live a life consistent with his convictions. He didn't wear soft clothes, eat rich foods, and live in a king's palace. Instead he wore camel's-hair garments, ate grasshoppers, and lived in the cruel desert. Why? Just to impress us? No. Because he recognized he couldn't love life's luxuries and at the same time do a good job in the task God had given him. Do you know how to deny yourself? How many of us can truthfully say that we are enjoying fewer of life's luxuries—let alone its necessities—because of our sacrificial giving and living for Jesus?

II. Please notice: This voice is from the desert

A. The desert plays a big role in Bible history.

1. It was out of Egypt with its fleshpots of pleasure that God called His people, out of Egypt and into the desert. There God kept His people 40 long and suffering years. Why? To teach them that they live by His Word alone and not by their own muscles. (Deut. 8:1 ff.)

2. It was through the desert that God led the returning Israelite exiles from Babylon to their Canaan home. That's why the prophet here calls for a way to be prepared in the desert. For that's the way over which God and the returning people will travel.

3. John the Baptist was in the desert. There he prepared himself by a rigorous life of self-denial for his tough task of preparing God's people for Christ.

4. Jesus was in the desert. Even as Israel spent 40 years in the desert, so Jesus spent 40 days there. In the desert He did what Israel didn't do. He successfully beat down every assault of Satan, and did it for us. In the desert Jesus prepared Himself for His ministry of living and dying for us.

B. The desert should play a big role in your life, too. How often are you in the desert—the desert of repentance and self-denial? In this desert of repentance we learn to practice the fast our Lord refers to in Matt. 6:19-21. Desert-going people don't get too fat. This would almost prompt us to say only desert-dwelling people get to heaven, for Jesus once said, "Beware lest you become overweight with too much concern with worldly goods and fun. For if that's the way you are, the Judgment Day will catch you like a trap; it will pounce upon you as a strong, swift lion pounces upon a gazelle too fat to out-run it." In the desert of daily repentance and self-denial you learn how to keep your weight down—the weight of overconcern for this life's goods.

III. *This voice is a leveling voice.*

It warns us: repent for Christ, the King, will soon return! This involves

A. Straightening your crooked way (v. 3). You don't like to travel on crooked, winding roads unless you have to. Nor does the Lord Jesus. He likes to travel through a heart that is righteous. The very word means straight. A heart that's straight and free from the crookedness of sin.

B. Getting rid of the bumps. "The uneven ground shall become level" (v. 4). What are the bumps in your life? Probably the ups and downs of your Christian living. One day you are hot with love and holiness, and the next day you are cold with selfishness

and sin. One day you are on the heights of holiness, the next day down in the depths of evil. Away with those bumps, those ups and downs, that on-and-off-again Christian behavior! For the coming Christ doesn't want to travel on bumps any more than you do.

C. Leveling the mountains (v. 4). You know what the mountains and hills are. They are the pride in your life.

1. The pride of our doubts. Do we know better than the Lord?

2. The pride of our work-righteousness. For example, do we churchgoers and outwardly decent people think ourselves holier and better than those who do not engage in such holy activity? Or again, how often don't we find ourselves thinking that our prayers to God for pardon are the means by which we earn and obtain our forgiveness? The merits of Jesus Christ alone atone.

D. Filling up the valleys (v. 4). The valleys are the low points in your life—those times when you feel so low in suffering you aren't sure even God can reach and help you; those moments when you curse the day of your birth because you are sure God has cursed you with unbearable affliction. Remember, Christ descends into the valleys—to the humble and the poor He gives His grace. The mourners, the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness, receive His kingdom.

E. Recognizing our frailty, it tells us that at best, we are still just fading grass (vv. 6 to 8). Like grass, our beauty fades. Like grass our mercy fades. That's what the Hebrew word here translated "beauty" means. How much like a fading grass is our human mercy. If we feel goodhearted and aren't too busy or too much put out, we might be merciful. It's always only for a little while. Our mercy is so much like a flower; it blooms quickly and is gone, replaced by the ugly weed of anger, hate, and selfishness. What a contrast! Our mercy is like the grass; God's mercy is like a towering mountain. The

proof is on that little hillock, Golgotha, where His Son gave up His life for our pardon and eternal safety. Like the grass we wither and die. Sooner or later the plant of our life is withered by the broiling sun of death. We fade and wither like the grass. Not so God's Word. It stands forever, says Isaiah. Jesus, God's Word in our flesh, is the Word that we trust when we begin to wither in death, for this living Word, this fleshly Word, has told us, "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that lives and believes in Me shall never die."

IV. *It is a lifting voice, speaking God's comfort* (vv. 1, 2)

A. Notice the repeated command, "Comfort, comfort . . ."

1. How much you really need comfort. You know you do—in those moments when your sins and sufferings overwhelm you and threaten to sweep you right out to your death in an angry sea of despair.

2. God really wants to give you comfort. You don't have to wring comfort from God. You don't have to twist His arm and force Him to give it to you. He loves to comfort people!

B. This is a tender comfort (v. 2). The picture here is of a bridegroom speaking soft words of love to his frightened bride. So God speaks to us. Yet He doesn't just speak these words to us; He gives us a Word—Jesus, His Son, in our flesh, Jesus, who died and rose again that God might pronounce words of pardon and love over us.

C. This comfort assures the end of our warfare. (The word for warfare here means time in military service.)

1. The war is over. Between you and God. By nailing the arms of Christ, His Son, to the cross God put down the arms of His wrath against your sins. The war is over! There is peace and pardon for all! Between you and all your other enemies: sin, pain, death, devil, hell. The war is over,

and you have won out over all these enemies—won out because Christ won the war for you!

2. Therefore your time in the military is also over. No war, no time in service. Imagine the joy of a GI being discharged from the service. How he counts the days! How happy he is when that day comes! So it is with you. You are out of the service; no longer a soldier fighting sin, devil, death, and hell. The war is over.

3. But it isn't! You still have to struggle and fight against sin, devil, and hell. You still have to suffer and die! What's the solution?

4. Christ. God's pledge of the ultimate victory. Jesus is God's Promise to you of final triumph over every evil. He is the assurance of the eternal peace which will one day be yours. In the meantime you have God's weapon to win: your faith in Jesus. St. John calls our faith "the victory that overcomes the world."

D. This comfort contains God's pardon.

1. "There is abundant pardon. Double for all your sins." Cf. Is. 60:17; 61:7. In the light of this it seems probable that the word "double" here refers to God's grace and not His punishment. For every sin, God gives two pardons, for where sin abounds, there God's grace superabounds. He doesn't barely cover our sins. He drowns them in the sea of His pardon.

2. This pardon is from the Lord's hand. Indeed it is. The hand of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, the hand of God nailed to a cross to "nail down" your pardon and eternal joy.

E. This is the comfort of a wonderful sight (v. 5).

1. You see God's glory, of all places, in a straw bed—the baby Jesus. This child is born to be our way to eternal glory.

2. You see God's glory in a crucified and risen man. Recall the words of Christ just

before His Passion, "Father, glorify your Son." How did God answer that prayer? By raising Christ up for all men to see—raising Him on a cross and out of a grave so that you might have glory with God forever. The hour of our Lord's deepest shame was the hour of His greatest glory.

Conclusion: This, then, is the Voice from the Desert. Hear it, believe it, and more than Christmas will be merry for you; your whole life will be merry, and above all, your life to come.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

DEUT. 18:15-19

After hearing these words, about all you can say is

What a Prophet!

I. *God raised Him*

A. The aged Moses was about to die. The people were perhaps wondering what would become of them after this great, strong leader would be no more. Therefore Moses promised, "Don't fret. God will raise up a prophet like me."

B. Indeed He did! Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and finally Jesus of Galilee. Yes, God indeed raised Christ. But only after lowering—into a manger God lowered this Prophet and then into a life of poverty, pain, a life of humble service to all. What an incredible lowering this is! For ponder who it is that is being lowered (Job 38:4-29; Is. 40:12 f.). This is the God who shrinks Himself into a baby and then lowers Himself into a bed of straw for you. Think of the people for whom He lowered Himself: enemies, God haters, stubborn, stiff-necked; not friends or loved ones who cried for help—but His enemies. It's so incredible, it could be only divine!

C. God raised this Prophet on a cross.

1. Like the copper snake (John 3:14).

Moses raised the snake on a pole; Jesus raised Himself.

2. Like a magnet, He draws us to Him for pardon and heaven. He sets us in the right relationship with our brother.

D. God raised this Prophet out of the grave. This is the greatest and most glorious raising of all! The raising that lifts us above our nagging fear of death—that lifts us above our despair of sin—that lifts us above our crushing burden. This raising of God's Son on Easter raises us in victory over the devil, hell, and all our sins.

E. God raised this Prophet up to His own right hand.

1. There He prays for us.

2. There He rules for us.

3. From there He will return for us. Therefore be ready!

F. By this raising of Christ onto a cross and out of a grave, we have

1. A lowering of our sins. Our sins were lowered into His vacated tomb there to be buried forever.

2. A raising of our sights (Col. 3:1). Live every second, live through every trial, frustration, and tragedy in the light of eternity.

3. A raising of yourself. Jesus promises, "Because I live, ye will live also."

II. *This Prophet is like Moses and yet different*

A. He is like Moses.

1. Both served as go-betweens. Take the case of Moses. He represented the people to God. Standing beneath the flaming, shaking Mount Sinai, terrified Israel could say only one thing: "Moses, you talk to God for us. We can't stand to get too close to Him, or we'll die! For we are combustible men, sinful men, and if we get too near this fiery God, we'll go up in eternal smoke." And so Moses went to the mountaintop and talked to God for His people. That's the

way it was during the 40 years of desert journeying; there was only indirect discourse with the Lord. Israel talked to God, dealt with God, only through Moses.

He represented God to the people. It was through Moses that God rescued Israel from Egypt. Through Moses, God gave Israel His law. Through Moses, God led and cared for His people in the desert. Moses was God's man for Israel. In his face the people saw the reflected — yet veiled — glory of the Almighty.

Even so it is with Christ. He represents us to God. He stands for us before God, and He *stands*. With the Hebrew poet we too are forced to confess: "If you, O Lord, would mark our sins, who would stand?" Who can stand perfect and acquitted before God? One man can and does stand before God — stands absolutely pure and guiltless. That man is Christ. And the comfort of it all is this: He stands there for us, in our place; in Him God sees you. Christ represents us before God in His death. Instead of killing us all for our sin, sending us all to the death of hell, God's justice was satisfied by one man, His only Son Jesus. His death is yours before God, the one you should have died but won't. Jesus represents you before God in His resurrection. Christ is ultimately you rising from the tomb; that's the way God sees it; why shouldn't you? Let's face it. Parts and sections of people just don't rise from the dead. It's either all or nothing. The whole man or none of him. Jesus rose from the grave, and if He did, then so did you. For your Baptism put you in the raised Christ.

He represents God to us. In his famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress," Luther confesses of Christ: "and there's none other God." He is the God you know, adore, and trust. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that even as kings and presidents impress their images on a coin, so God has impressed His very image, Himself on the coin of Christ — on the flesh of Jesus. What a precious coin we

have in the manger. For this coin, this Christ, is God Himself giving Himself as the payment for our sins.

2. Both were on intimate terms with God. Moses saw God face to face; Christ lay on the Father's bosom. So writes St. John. He lay on His Father's bosom and came to interpret the Father to us — to be a living commentary on God. Yet Jesus didn't just see God face to face; He was and is God's Face for us to see, a face full of mercy and concern and love, a face for us to see in the night of sorrows and in the dark night of death.

B. *He is different from Moses.*

1. Moses went up to Sinai to speak with God for the people; Jesus went up to Calvary to die for all the people. On Calvary, God didn't talk for a while with His Son; Christ called out, but His Father didn't answer.

2. Moses was *willing* to be blotted from God's book of life in place of his people. Jesus wasn't just willing to give His life for you — He did.

III. *This Prophet is one of us* (v. 15)

A. This promise to Israel meant that they would always have plenty of preachers from their own midst.

B. With joy in our hearts we say Jesus was indeed from our brothers and one of us. And above all, one with us — with us in all of our temptations and sufferings — with us in our death that we might be with Him and the Father forever.

IV. *This Prophet we must hear* (vv. 15, 19)

A. Not merely in the preaching of the Word on Sunday morning or in private Bible study,

B. But on the lips of our fellow saints. Christ speaks to us in people as they warn and admonish us in our wandering from the faith. Christ speaks to us in their good example and through their holiness of life. Christ is talking to us in the good advice and

counsel our fellow Christians give to us in life's difficult corners.

C. And in life's events. Christ speaks to us in our prosperity saying, "Repent, for you don't deserve this happiness; it is a pure gift of My grace." Christ speaks to us in our afflictions. He is saying, "Get closer to Me. You are living too much by the bread of goods and not enough by the bread of My Word; you are becoming too independent and godless in your thinking and living." Do we hear the Christ who speaks to us in our pains? Every pain, be it ever so slight and momentary, is the herald of death telling us to prepare to meet our God, to set our affections on things of the enduring world and not on the fast-fleeting world of goods of this life. Do you hear the Christ who speaks thus to you in your pains? God give us hearing ears.

CHRISTMAS

Is. 9:6

For many of you tonight is the night. Tonight is that happy hour in which you take the wrapping off your Christmas presents. And that is just what we want to do here during this hour of adoration. We want to unwrap our great gift from God, Jesus, the Child of Mary. And as we do so, our only words can be

What a Present!

I. *Unto us a Child is born*

The greatest comfort and gladness in the fact that a baby has been born is ours when we can add the words "for us." Don't hold back! Go ahead and open this Present from God. It has your name on it, and you can be sure that you won't exchange this Gift. There is nothing better suited to your liking or need. For this Child of Mary is just what you have been wanting and needing ever since you were old enough to feel your first fear of death, the pangs of your first-remem-

bered fault or suffering, the terror for an eternity of pain. Now we don't have to want or need any more. We have this Present, this man Child of Mary, who delivers us from death, devil, hell, and sin.

II. *Unto us a Child is born*

A child! How silly of God to send a child to do a man's job, a man to do a superman's job. You don't defeat death and the devil with helpless babies and frail men. You need strong angels to do that. Everyone knows that! Everyone, that is, but God! Commenting on God's apparently foolish wisdom in sending a frail man to conquer Satan, Luther once said: "I often delight myself with that similitude in Job of an anglehook that fishermen cast into the water, putting on the hook a little worm. Then comes the fish and snatches up the worm and thereby gets the hook in his jaws, and the fisherman pulls him out of the water. Even so has our Lord God dealt with the devil. God has cast into the world His only Son as the hook and upon the hook has put Christ's humanity as the worm. Then comes the devil and snaps at the man Christ and devours Him, and therewith he bites the iron hook, that is, the Godhead of Jesus, which chokes him, and all his power is thereby thrown to the ground. This is called divine wisdom."

III. *Unto us a Son is given*

I am sure Isaiah would not object if we use the term of the New Testament and instead read, Unto us *the* Son is given. This is God's only Child in the flesh of Jesus. In this fact lies the greatness of God's Gift. We aren't getting a last-minute present from the Lord, one of the leftovers He couldn't give to anyone else, nor are we receiving a cheap present, a bargain bought by God at a reduced price. God didn't have the problems we have had during the past pre-Christmas days of who gets what. I say, God didn't have this problem because He had only

one present to give, only one Son to offer. What a Present!

IV. *This Child will have sore shoulders*

He is going to carry the government. There are revolutionists abroad in this world of God: the devil and his followers, sin, suffering, and death. God, of course, cannot tolerate such a revolt against His rule, and so He sent Jesus by whom He crushes both the revolt and the revolters. Thus Jesus brings the rule of God back to a world once chained to Satan, sin, and suffering. He brings that rule back by submitting for 33 long and painful years to the rule of human woe and weakness. He carries God's government once again over the devil, death, pain, and every evil only because He once carried a cross on which He was then slain. That's how His shoulders got sore. His got sore that yours might be healed. The burdens are still backbreaking, the burdens of each day's sins and miseries. Yet because Christ's back once bled from the blows of a Roman scourge, because His back once gave out beneath the weight of a crushing cross, we know that the load of our present pain will one day be completely lifted from us.

V. *Now to the name of this Child!*

A. He is a wonder of a counselor. This word "wonder" has in it the idea of someone or something both beyond us and for us. For example, Moses called Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea a wonder. It was a mighty act of God contrary to nature's laws and for the good of God's hard-pressed people. That's what a wonder is, a miraculous rescue.

1. It is small wonder, then, that Jesus is called a wonder. For this is an impossible Child, this virgin-born Baby. Impossible because He is God and man joined together in one person. He is all man, subject to man's sufferings, frailties, limitations, wants, weaknesses, and death. He is all God with all of

God's love, power, wisdom, and glory. Jesus' greatest miracle is what He is: full God and full man in one person. He is this miracle in order that He might perform the miracle of our rescue from devil, death, hell, and sin. It's small wonder that Jesus is called a wonder.

2. He is a wonder of a *counselor*. In Old Testament language, a counselor was the king's by-stander, his adviser. Again, it is small wonder that Christ is called a counselor, for He stands by us in our temptations and sorrows. Yet He is more than a by-stander; He is our Burden Bearer. He doesn't just stand by and give us His advice or sympathy. No, He shoulders our sins and sufferings, bears them to a cross, and there disposes of them for us.

3. One of the first requirements of a counselor is that he should know what he is talking about. Such knowledge comes through experience, and experience is just what Jesus has had plenty of—experience with our painful wrestlings against Satan, experience with all our trials and sufferings, experience even with our death, experience with an experience we will never know—the agonies of the damned. Armed with that experience, what a counselor our Lord makes as we turn to Him in our temptations and pains. And His counsel to us is not just words but grace to help in time of need.

B. This Child is the mighty God. Certainly to call this tiny Christ the mighty God demands every ounce of faith within us. For does this Child look much like the God painted by the ancient poet (Ps. 18:2, 7-15)? This Child a rocklike God, when a rock could so easily crush Him in His helplessness? This Child our Shield when He must be shielded from harm and cold by His mother's loving arms? This Child the Horn of our salvation, the God like a strong bull, whose horns will toss to the skies our enemies—death, hell, and sin? This frail Child

such a mighty, saving God? Only the voice of a valiant, daring faith can say, "Yes, indeed!"

1. And you know how we measure the might of this mighty God. Certainly we see His might as He rides the wings of the wind. But we see that might more as He rides a donkey into Jerusalem. For He rode into that city to carry a cross out of the city to Golgotha, there to die that our sins might go and God might come to us with His pardon and the pleasures of heaven.

2. How shall we measure the might of God? By the fact that the earth rocks and reels and the mountains shiver at His anger? An impressive display, indeed, of His might! And yet we see that might more when Jesus died. Once again the earth reeled and rocked, split open so that buried saints might rise and thus furnish the first proof that by Christ's death death had died. How measure God's might? By His mercy, His mercy that has rescued us from all of our afflictions.

C. This Child is the everlasting Father. What a Present God gives us on Christmas Day! He is actually wrapping Himself up in the box of Christ's flesh. We are not getting a present from God; we are getting God Himself as the Present. And so you know now how to respond if someone should ask you, "What did you get for Christmas?"

D. This Child is the Prince of peace.

1. That, you say, is the kind of prince I really want and need. For tensions within and without are driving me to the brink of a breakdown. That's how you feel? Then I wonder if this is the Prince you want. For this is what He once said (Matt. 10:34-39). Our Lord here refers to the war that must be present in our lives as we battle with our own selfish flesh and the sinful, tempting world about us—as we fight to be dedicated to God and be different from the unholy people about us—as we struggle to let

nothing, not even our loved ones, become dearer to us than the daily performance of God's will. Paul knew this struggle as he wrote, "The good I want to do, I don't do, and the evil I don't want to do, I do. What a wretched man I am!" Or again, "The desires of our sinful nature are always contrary to the desires of our better self, and these two natures are always at war." You see, once you become a Christian, you are a split personality. Before, you were only one man—the devil's man; now you are both God's man and the devil's man at the same time. And that means tension, war, and not peace! The tension of being torn between two wills—two ways, the way of God and the way of Satan. The more saintly you become, the greater you are torn in this tension. Yet for your comfort remember that this tension, this war between flesh and spirit, is a sure sign and proof that God is at work in you that you are one of His own. And isn't that a peaceful thought?

2. This peace that Christ gives is not, in His own words, the peace of the world, the peace of no pain, the peace of a contentment built on every possible material blessing. Christ's peace is the power to bear pain and crosses with an undercalm and quiet based upon God's promise that every pain is a blessing in disguise and that the pains we now suffer can't even be compared with the glory to come. Christ's peace is the peace of conscience, a peace which tells us that the war between the holy God and wicked us is now forever over. This is a peace which tells us that the Prince Himself was chastised with the pains of a cross so that we might have the peace of pardon and the joys of eternal life. And that peace no affliction can ever take from us.

Conclusion: The wraps are off the Present. What a Present!

Richmond Heights, Mo.