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HOMILETICS

TRINITY II

June 7

Worship Supplement: Forms of the Intercessions—Throughout the Year, II (pp. 39—40)

The Epistle for the day is 1 John 3:13-18 ("love in deed and in truth") and could well be the text. The Gospel is Luke 14:16-24 (parable of the great supper).

Point— "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue," writes St. John in the Epistle. But I disagree. In fact it shall be the very purpose of this sermon to inspire this entire congregation to do a lot more loving in words and tongues than we currently are doing. The words and tongues I have in mind, however, are the words and tongues of prayer. For to love someone enough to pray for him is certainly a first step toward loving "in deed and in truth." And to this each one of us has been called, to pray and thus to begin our true doing. What we should concern ourselves about in prayer is everything that concerns every one of our fellowmen, as this new form of the Intercessions helps to make clear. (Consider the various persons and needs represented.)

Problem— We pray for others all too seldom, and then frequently only for those who are dear to us ("me and my wife, our son John and his wife, us four and no more"). And why don't we pray for others?—because we don't love them enough. For to love someone is to want the best for him, and then to be willing to make the utmost sacrifice for him. We don't feel this way toward very many, in some cases, because we haven't fully appropriated God's great love in Christ and its blessings of release from sin and self. Bound by these, guilt and fear lie heavy on us, and our lives seem

doomed. Hence we spend all our energy just trying to redeem our own life. In this state we simply can't afford to think of others. In other cases we have never actually heard our death sentence from God: if we are not loving our brother—and not praying for him may be an evidence—then we "remain in death." It is not an uncertainty which we might manage to wiggle through, not a gamble which we might still manage to win. If we are not loving—that means hating, that means murdering—we "have no eternal life abiding in us." If we have not heard that death sentence, we have really not heard the Gospel's reprieve. We've just taken it for a compliment to our "good" life, and it has not been for us a source of *new life*, of the *God-life*.

Power— Christ, the perfect man, thought about others. He thought about us—thought about us so much, in fact, that in the process He completely forgot about Himself—and this to the degree of even dying for us. "By this we know love"—both recognize it and attain it.

What this did to sin! It wiped it completely out of the picture, as far as we are concerned, so that now we need feel no guilt, no fear or eventual doom. We are forgiven. Our sins are gone. Before God we stand pure and holy. Life forever is ours. And so we don't have to worry about the future—what will happen? . . . will we make it? In Christ we have made it. And so our thoughts can turn to others, and we can start to do something to help them make it too. And what better place to start than with a word of prayer.

And what Christ's dying did to us sinners! It made us lovers. God's love came "to *abide* in us." He laid down His life for us—and He can put it into us just as capably as He took it again in His resurrection. And He

does. We know it because we do feel for our brothers and—even though timidly and minimally—we do love, that is to say, put ourselves out for them. Know that love of Christ in you. Show that love by loving. Start that love showing by praying.

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TRINITY III

June 14

Worship Supplement: The Prayer of Thanksgiving, I (p. 45; see p. 27)

"Next Sunday we will celebrate Holy Communion," the parish bulletin announces. But often the actual service has seemed sad for a celebration, and sometimes it seemed terribly mental, a *cerebration* of contrition. Humbly contrite we must be in all honesty, but sad is not for "celebration"—it is for "unforgiven sinners." These Prayers of Thanksgiving help to make each Communion a thanksgiving celebration, that is, if they are *prayed*—and prayed by eucharistic people.

The Epistle (1 Peter 5:6-11) warns us to be humble—but ours should be the humility of the sheep on the shoulder of the Shepherd, the coin in the fist of the Finder. Knowing our lostness, we yet rejoice in our foundness. Though humbled by the briars of our wanderings, we are exalted by the shoulder of our Savior. Aware of the basic color blindness that can't really see that the grass over the fence is dried brown, still we live in the center of celebration by owner and neighbor and angel.

Point—Thank God with humbleness but in joyful celebration. All the reasons and all the remembrance and all the response are in this Sacrament. God is "holy, almighty, most merciful." He has "great glory." He "did so love the world." Remember Jesus—His teaching, suffering and death, His promise of the second coming. What we are made

it necessary; what He is made it possible. Thanks, humble, joyful thanks!

Problem—Something is wrong with our humility. We are not sober and watchful, perhaps; if we were fully changed into thankful people, we would not want to pet the devilish lion. Something's wrong with our celebration. Didn't we want to be found? Or do we think it a small thing that our speck of protoplasm was visible to God in this world's Sahara? Or are we afraid the Finder's fist will open and drop us again, or the Shepherd's shoulder grow weary? We do face affliction and temptation. There is injustice to the "unworthy"; we are sinners, weak, facing the possibility of losing salvation, facing problems in health, in family, in weather, in world and social crises, in the church. But that was a great rescue, that a great find by which we were rescued and found. Will He that spared not His Son, He that sought until He found—will He not give us the help we need? What is it in us that doubts?

Power—Go back over it—how did the saving happen? He came seeking—not just a quick look around in case He might see us . . . what's one sheep? But it was carefully conceived, this Word-of-God-made-flesh plan. And faithfully developed—He grew in favor with God and men. Thirty-three years invested—a long time to search for a ewe, for all of us. He knew when He found us how to go about saving us—but can we ever think it simple, this redemption that took the life of God? But though He died at it, He came to life again—God's Son, risen. Remember Him, in all His glory and the power that was before the world began—and still He has shoulders. And we are on them.

The power of God is ours in this holy celebration—to receive it is to thank Him . . . eucharist; to receive it is to receive power from Him to thank Him. He fills us with heavenly peace and joy through the holy

communion. He gives us "forgiveness together with the gifts of life and salvation." He "sanctifies us in body and soul and spirit." The propers remind us that God cares for us — He comforts us, welcomes us, rejoices over us, seeks us, helps us. He is a merciful God; He is called our Strength, our Rock, our Fortress, our Deliverer. How can we but thank such a God who puts such power at our disposal!

See the walking devil who would devour — and be humble; but resist the roar that tries to curb your joy, resist steadfast in the faith, in humble, joyful celebration.

TRINITY IV

June 21

Worship Supplement: Hymn 768:
"In Thee Is Gladness"

Really? Praise God? Shout for gladness? Our *Problem* seems quite apparent — life is full of sadness and sorrow, troubles and tribulations, so empty and lonely, so weary and tiresome. The words of the hymn that seem truest are "sadness," "bonds," "powers of earth, sin, death," "distresses," "worry," "anxiety." The implications are just as recognizable — our souls are asleep, our life-buildings wobble, His changing breath does not breathe on us, and though heaven rejoices, we have little to shout about on earth. The Epistle's "In my opinion whatever we may have to go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us" (Rom. 8:18 Phillips) seems to be just that — one man's opinion. This seems to be more accurate: "It is plain to anyone with eyes to see that at the present time all created life groans in a sort of universal travail"; or, "It is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension . . ." (Rom. 8:22-23 Phillips). Here our *Problem* changes from "apparent" to "actual." It is deeper than surface troubles. It is not just

what happens *to* us, but what is happening *in* us is worse — we are the unmerciful, we judge and we condemn and we withhold forgiveness (the Gospel: Luke 6:36-42). Believe it who will — "Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap." When we do not believe God, when we feel only the negative strain of the "tension," when the Spirit leaves us with only an "aftertaste" of inward groaning, of bondage to decay, and of futility, then we know our *Problem*.

The *Point* is clear: "In thee is gladness amid all sadness — Jesus!" Praise God! Love Him! Raise glad hymns forever! Get with it, with all creation — "The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own" (Rom. 8:19 Phillips). Praise God because of His control of the world situation and His eventual victory over all evil and suffering; praise God, for He is concerned and He does not condemn and He does forgive, and He does pour beyond our poor giving all good things into our laps. Not "in spite of" but *in* our state of painful tension praise God! *Amid* all sadness praise Him in whom is gladness.

In God and of God and from God are gladness and sunshine and glory and gifts of heaven and the Redeemer. He breaks, He wakes, He stands, He sees, He blesses. "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the Strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "Forgive our sins, O Lord . . . Help us, O God of our salvation" (the Introit and the Gradual). We can know gladness *amid* sadness because that futility under which creation is subject exists by the will of Him "who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20-21). It must have seemed only punishment when God drove Adam out of

the Garden—but He did it “lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever” (Gen. 3:22), forever a sinner and dead in his sin. But now we live in hope—the hope He gave us when He gave His Son, the hope that was made possible by that Son’s gift of His life, the hope that is sure since He became the firstfruits of the dead; the hope that we already have as the firstfruits of the Spirit. We are redeemed—that is our certain hope—even while we “wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realized our full sonship in Him” (Rom. 8:21 Phillips). Praise God!

Material submitted by
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TRINITY V

June 28

Worship Supplement: The Office of Prime
(pp. 112—115)

Introduction: We’re all acquainted with the word “prime”—prime rib, prime time on radio and TV. We know it involves the best, the most important, and the most expensive. This sets up a comparison with the Office of Prime. It involves the best time, the beginning of a new day, as we live our lives in relation to our God. It is important that a Christian turn to the Lord as he embarks on the adventure of a new day, but this becomes, for him, an expensive step to take. It means surrender. It involves obedience. It is commitment to the One who is totally committed in love to us.

Problem—The Office of Prime begins with a plea for God’s delivering power. We are conscious on this Fifth Sunday After Trinity that we might best begin with the words of Peter, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” The evidence of our condition is so clearly spelled out by today’s Epistle (1 Peter 3:8-15), in which we see

ourselves as backbiting, evil-tongued, hate-filled, evil-doing creatures. Basic to all this is that we are not ready to give the best and most expensive to God. In our attempts to keep these things for ourselves, we turn against our fellowmen, and even against God. The Lord would turn His back on us as evil-doers, and we find ourselves toiling in vain and living in emptiness apart from Him. “Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me.”

Power—Glory be to our God, Father, Son, and Spirit, for He does deliver. Our Savior never departed from a sinner or withdrew from evil. Instead of departing from sinful Peter, Jesus invited the disciples to follow Him. A whole new life opened up for the fisherman, and he became a fisher of men. A whole new life awaits us on this new day, a new life with Christ. He will not depart from us but abides and directs and inspires with new hope. We can pray with confidence: “Hide your face from my sins, O Lord, and blot out all my iniquities,” and continue on with the words of Psalm 51 in this Office of Prime. God will renew and restore and forgive for Jesus’ sake. He did give to us His best and most expensive, His only begotten, His beloved. He does give us His life, new life for the new tasks of this new day. The evidences of this life are described by Peter, who had so clearly experienced how Christ pays back evil with love and empowers men to love.

Point—At this best moment of the day we make a most expensive decision, a decision to follow Christ. We begin in worship and go forth in surrender. We are assured that our Lord’s ear is open to our prayer, and so we can seek from Him in the Sunday collect the power for a joy-filled life which praises Him. We call Him Lord. He is our Master. We surrender ourselves at the expense of a life in the world, with the world. We have the best—a life in the world but

with Christ. As we make Him our Lord, according to v. 15 of the Epistle, our lives are blessed with His presence, enriched with His love, empowered by His compassion. And the truth of the Psalm Antiphon be-

comes a reality each morning: "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord."

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