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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

ALL SAINTS' DAY

NOVEMBER 1

Worship Supplement

"From All Thy Saints in Warfare" (Hymn 756)

What place do we give the saints in our day of "new theology"? More to the point—what place among the saints do we hope to have, not only when death takes over and history draws its conclusions, but now when life goes on ("I forget just how") and history is being written?

Eutychus, the columnist in *Christianity Today*, suggested that "The Dirty Dozen" would be an appropriate title for a sermon on the 12 apostles. In this motion picture the major picks 12 men out of the maximum security section of an army disciplinary barracks, all under the death penalty, to undertake an almost impossible mission. By force of his personality and his authority the major transforms those men into a dozen men—dirty no longer—ready, with the usual help Hollywood provides, to succeed.

Well, the connection is rather obvious—Peter, James and John, and Andrew and Matthew, Philip and Bartholomew, the other James and Thomas, and Jude, and Simon, and Judas—they were washed and they were clean, but certainly as fishermen and tradesmen, unlearned and unlettered, as inept and unlikely a group to conquer Satan and to win the world as any "dirty dozen." It reminds us of our own "high calling of God" (Phil. 3:14). Basically and fundamentally we are all, as Adam was, but dust—that's dirt—and like him, like the dirty dozen, whatever innocence of childhood we once possessed and however good and noble our original intentions, we rebelled and we deserted, with hate we killed our fellowman, we robbed God of that time that was His,

of talent that should have been devoted to service in His kingdom, of treasures that should have been given to His poor. We "have offended against God's holy laws, have left undone those things which we ought to have done . . . and done those things which we ought not to have done."

You and I, just like the dirty dozen, were called and chosen for the greatest, the hardest, and the most glorious mission here on earth—a mission, mind you, that is made up of day-by-day little tasks and person-to-person interaction, for all its glorious goal of destroying the works of Satan and sharing salvation with men.

New creatures we would have to become to accomplish that, and new creatures we became, not by entering a second time into our mother's womb, but by putting on Jesus Christ. He converts, changes, challenges, and charges us with new life, just as He did the apostles. Personality and authority were involved—yes; but it was by *service*, by *ministry* that He changed us, washed us from dirty to disciple (the footwashing in the Upper Room, and all that followed).

The picture ended with just the major and a single survivor of the original dirty dozen—but that's Hollywood, things never true to the way they really are. For the Captain of our salvation *lost* only one of His twelve—they were persecuted and killed and one died of old age, but none were lost, except that one who *perished*—"I kept them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me . . . and none of them is lost but the son of perdition" (John 17:12). Today, tomorrow, and until our glorious end, we live as the saints of God on earth walking in the footsteps of the Twelve, the dirty dozen, who win the everlasting victory even as they live the everyday life.

FRANK J. BAUER
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TRINITY XXIV

NOVEMBER 8

Worship Supplement

Hymns 784: "O God of Earth and Altar"
 785: "Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord"
 787: "O God of Love, O King of Peace"

Perhaps it has been the dogmatic assertion of the constitutional necessity of complete separation of church and state that has resulted in the paucity of preaching about the Christian and his nation or about the moral issues involved in civil affairs. Whatever the cause, because of the fact we welcome several fresh hymns in the *Worship Supplement* under the heading of "The Nation."

The fact must be underscored that "peace in our time" can only come by God (Hymn 785). Sermons by the bale have been preached on that theme. Somehow many of them evaded the realities of Christian life in the world—that God does not spread the church by angel wings, that He uses His creatures, even spreading His Word by the mouth of an ass, but chiefly depending on men to carry out His will. The *Point* of a sermon must be to supplant the strange notion that God's people can be cut out of part of creation or can somehow be relieved of their duty of redeeming their countries, which, like time and "the days" we are to redeem, are evil.

There seems to be a renewed interest in having the church express its concern for the nation, the world, and issues such as war and peace. One may wonder if such consciousness is awakened by repentance or the fear of what is "eschatologizing" in the air above Vietnam and over our cities. Our *Problem* is stated with a great deal of specificity by G. K. Chesterton in "O God of Earth and Altar" (Hymn 784). Chesterton once wrote that earth was "the place where God was homeless/And all men are at home." Thomas

à Kempis observed, "All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace." The God of both earth and altar is implored to hear of man's condition because "rulers falter" and "people drift." It is difficult to forget what the Establishment did to Jesus and how actual historic people drifted from palm branches to a tree of crucifixion. It should be easy to remember the failure of political promises and the short attention span of those elected to govern once they are in office although the governed still cry out against injustice. Prosperity's "walls of gold entomb us," and when fear finally moves us off dead center, "the swords of scorn divide." Brother does not help brother naturally.

To be delivered from this damnation we need a special *Power*. "The Bible charges us to love our neighbors and our enemies; probably because they are usually the same people," was the way Chesterton put the difficult objective. Two of these hymns indicate that peace may come only when we are bound in a "heavenly chain," "a living tether." Those are chords only God could forge and weave. He had first connected man to Himself by such ties. Man was able to break them. Only God can re-create them. And God is about, has been about, exactly that task. It was this loving "mind of Christ" which brought Him into our world, obedient to the will of His Father and ready to suffer the death of the cross and the condemnation of divine law in order to bring us all together again. And this mind is now our possession. It is what "we have in Christ." We need to think with it, work with it.

Perhaps the v-shaped peace sign, combining what we can do by our hands with what God did on the cross, can symbolize the votum of peace that we can receive from the God of earth and altar.

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TRINITY XXV

NOVEMBER 15

Worship Supplement

Hymn 759:

"In Adam We Have All Been One"

Hymn 758:

"O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth"

The lessons which conclude the Christian year (1 Thess. 4:13; 2 Peter 3:3-4; 2 Thess. 1:3-10; Matt. 24:15-28; Matt. 25:31-46) describe the end times and underscore what the Christian watches for and how he waits.

The word "end" always sounds so final to us, as if everything were about to come crashing down around our ears. Geologists tell us that one day the earth will freeze over. Philosophers of despair terrify us with assertions about life having no meaning, claiming that human existence is like newly hatched turtles frantically trying to reach the sea before being devoured by swooping birds of prey. And everyone lives with the upsetting thought that civilized mankind is capable of incinerating our earth with the press of a button.

The prospect of such an end produces fear that is hardly a basis for Christian faith and life. When the New Testament speaks of "the end" it means not *finis* but fulfillment, not that moment when everything stops but when everything at last comes into its own, not when God slams the door shut on us and His creation but when His plan and purposes for us in Jesus Christ unfold.

This is the note on which we "end" the church year. In fact, it was in this hope that we began it. There is something eschatological about the entire church year, from Advent to Pentecost. Throughout Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the Lord, the Bringer of a new age. We live with the Word that God, by raising Jesus from the dead and by giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit, is now writing the final chapter of history. Things are mov-

ing toward completion, toward ultimate healing and oneness.

The final Sundays in the Trinity season (happily we are now beginning to celebrate rather the "After Pentecost" season) provide cues regarding eschatological living.

The 26th Sunday After Pentecost (25th After Trinity) may be used to help us discover our oneness in God. Two hymns in the *Supplement*, "In Adam We Have All Been One" (759) and "O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth" (758), describe our solidarity in Adam and Christ and direct us to that unity which we anticipate through the Spirit of God and in which we already participate.

We long for oneness. We look for events and experiences that will heal the broken body of mankind and unite us with God and one another. We recall President Nixon's words to the astronauts as they stood on the moon: "For one priceless moment in the whole history of man, all the people on this earth are truly one."

We were created for oneness, because God is one. But we have lost that oneness. We now have many gods. We have split God up into many things, many deities, personal, national, racial, into an idol incapable of unifying and reconciling.

And in the process man ceases to be one, becomes fragmented, schizophrenic. We find that community is disintegrating in our day whether among nations or races or cities or neighborhoods—even in our churches. Lacking any sense of oneness with God, we live in a divided, separated world. Our loss of community is evidence of our loss of God.

Yet God remains one. This is what we mean somehow when we confess the Trinity, that there is a unity and harmony in God's being which enables Him to create and redeem and reconcile and heal. Only He who is one within Himself can create unity, bringing things together, gathering people into community.

So, God gave us Christ, who is as the writer to the Hebrews says, "the express image of the Father," meaning that God's oneness is in Him, that perfect fellowship which God has within Himself and with all men. Why else does the Lord become flesh and die and rise from death, except that God by these acts wants to resolve the broken and fragmented life of man, to remove hostility, to reestablish fellowship and community?

What else are we then as the church but the human, earthly expression of the oneness of God, a community gathered together from many places and classes and races for the purpose of showing the whole world who God is, what He has prepared and is still preparing for all men? William Stringfellow has said: "The ecumenical hope is that the church may live—in the midst of this world's fragmentation, conflict, and alienation—as the one reconciled community in which the world can see and foresee the reconciliation vouchsafed for all the world in Christ."

Therefore, let us who are many be one, as God is one! (From the Pauline letters see Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12; Eph. 4:1-6. See especially the words of our Lord in John 17:20-23.)

TRINITY XXVI

NOVEMBER 22

Worship Supplement

Offertory for After Pentecost (p. 33)

The thrust of the 27th Sunday After Pentecost (Trinity XXVI) is a call to step up the pace in response to God's reconciliation in Christ and make visible in our families and churches and denominations for all the world the oneness and fullness of God's love in Jesus.

One of the After-Pentecost Offertories (p. 33 in the *Worship Supplement*) encourages us "to stir up one another to love and good works," which is our worship, our response

to God as we anticipate the dawning of the Day, the joyful end of all things. In other words, each member of the body contributes to the building up of the whole body. The oneness which God has created in Christ we begin to realize and enjoy here and now through individual participation and contribution.

This oneness, however, does not imply sameness. Sameness does not make oneness; oneness never requires sameness. As a matter of fact, oneness encourages differences. What we need in our marriages and our family life, in our church life and in our relationships with other Christians (certainly other Lutherans!) is not tranquility and serenity as much as human warmth and concern. Peace is not order as much as it is harmony. Peace and oneness and community come about not by regimentation or uniformity but by the gift of the Spirit working through all the gifts, all the different people in the church.

There is no greater evil than that which robs a man of his identity as a child of God and a brother. There is nothing worse than that pride or fear or hate that destroys community and isolates us from fellowship, that makes us so dependent or independent that we are no longer able to contribute to life, to the happiness of others, to the common good of all.

These devils our Lord has defeated and has given us the life of His new body, the healing and reconciliation of His cross and resurrection. The New Testament pictures our Lord as the One who sets us free, who overwhelms those powers that once held man captive, the evil that separates man from God, that divides man from man, that destroys our wholeness and inner unity (Eph. 4:8). When our Lord had beaten the devil at his own game by His death upon the cross, He was raised as Lord to gather us into His body.

Thus in the new age of Jesus Christ each man has something to offer, some work,

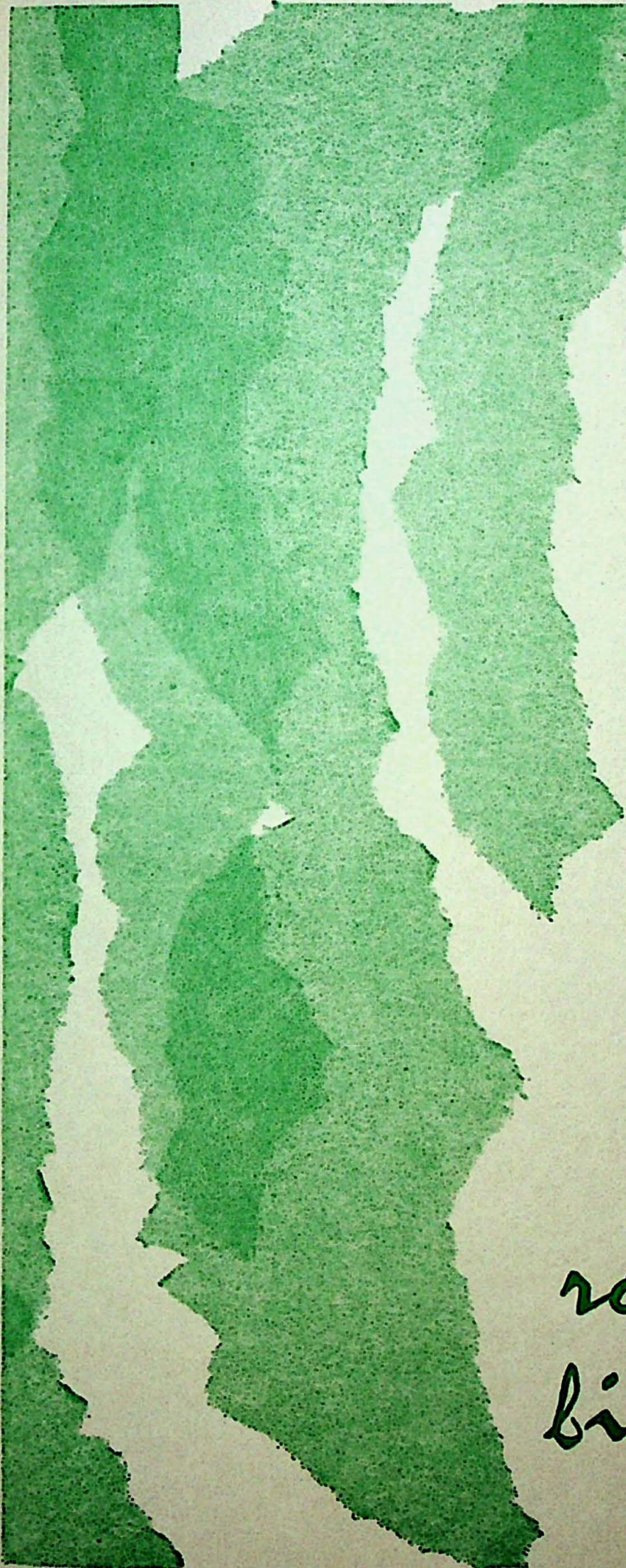
some service, some encouragement, some idea for the sake of the community (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11). Every individual person has a place and a part, a privilege and a pride as one of the Lord's, as a member of His body.

We even have our differences to offer. These too can be for the common good, if our differences, even our disagreements, do not arise from personal prejudice or fear. Bishop Emrich of Detroit writes: "It is quite pleasing to God, I am sure, when little men and women who disagree strongly and are very different, kneel together at an altar to receive grace and forgiveness. What spoils both church and state is not controversy, but

pride, arrogance, trying to crush the richness of life in 'my' insights—what spoils controversy is the breaking of fellowship, the seeking of publicity more than the truth."

We don't need sameness when we have oneness. Let us not seek uniformity and suppress individuality. We need one another. How else can we demonstrate that we are the body of Christ? How else can we show that we live in the end time, awaiting the return of our Lord, anticipating the day when all things will find their fullness and fulfillment in the one Christ?

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