

Devotion on the Collect for the Second Sunday after Easter - 15 April 2013, Anno Domini



The Second Sunday after Easter.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Second Sunday after Easter is referred to as the Good Shepherd Sunday for the obvious reason that both the Gospel Text (John 10:11 & The Epistle (1 Peter 2:19) is that of the Good Shepherd whom Jesus is for us. The Collect for today calls pastors to the high standard set in Christ as under-shepherds of the flock, and to the layperson as well, in striving to approach that plumline of righteousness set up by our Lord and Savior. The Collect does not appear in traditional worship until the 1549 Book of Common Prayer for which it was composed.

Though this prayer is well-written and has deep meaning for the Church and its pastors, I would have preferred, for the sake of exactness and clarity, that one word would have been added between "only" and "Son." You may think me too persnickety regarding this point of meaning, but, to be honest, Jesus was NOT the only Son of God. To omit referring to Jesus as the only BEGOTTEN Son is to obscure the great distinction of who Christ is in comparison with us. Since Scripture plainly grants that all who receive Christ are sons of God (John 1:12, Romans 8:14, Galatians 4:6, Philippians 2:15, 1 John 3:1&2), does it not follow that Christ bears a particular Son-ship which is not of the same nature with our own? Does Christ not proceed from the same substance with the Father with like nature and complete agreement of purpose? Are we likewise perfect as sons of God? May I remind you that we are not in any wise like unto Christ in fullness of righteousness, power, or holiness? We have no righteousness of our own, but claim that IMPUTED righteousness of Christ. So how do we differ from Christ if we are also sons and daughters of God? Romans 8:15 gives the answer most clearly: *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God* (Romans 8:14-16) I consider it most necessary to make this distinction. I realize that there are some references in the New Testament to Christ as the Son of God, but the context always clarifies His special status as separate in nature from you and me.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life. Why do targets display a bulls eye (the large black dot at the center) surrounded by ever larger concentric circles? Why not just display the bull's eye alone and be done with it? The bull's eye is difficult to hit by the trained marksman, but the outer circles give him some understanding of how NEAR the bull's eye he came. The righteousness of Christ is the Bulls Eye at 500 yards, at 1,000 yards, and at one million miles distant. When a marksman aims at the target, he aims at the bull's eye, but at a great distance away, he will often miss that bull's eye – the outer rings also count for points, but not as much so as the bull's eye. If we simply aim at the whole target, we will seldom approach the bull's eye of righteousness and may even miss the whole target. When we aim, in our lives, for the Bulls Eye of Righteousness which Christ has established, we will always come closer to the perfect point than if we only aim at the general area. As our lives are continually sanctified by the inner workings of the Holy Ghost, our marksmanship will also improve by and by. Christ is our example after whom we must always tailor our lives and conduct. We can never be perfect in the way that He is perfect, but we will come closer to that perfection by continually striving to hit the mark.

But far more than an example to us is Christ as our Redeemer of our sin-debt. Without His sacrifice at Calvary we would be far-gone on the road to Hell. It is Christ's death and resurrection that offered us the opportunity to aim at that perfect Bulls Eye He has set before us.

The early heretical teachings of Pelagius (they are still in the major churches of America) taught that we could strive to be righteous enough on our own to gain salvation if we only winked at God from time to time. The Holy Scriptures refute that heresy. We have not even a hint of righteousness on our own merits and efforts – all of our righteousness comes by grant of grace from God. It is His grace working in our members that lead us in the paths of righteousness. Being blind as sheep, we cannot find that path without being led there. The Shepherd Psalms points that out: *"...he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."* (Psalms 23:3) If we are led, indeed, by the Hand of God and not by our own whims and imaginations, we shall surely find those paths of righteousness. *Give us GRACE that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit* You will note that even our thankfulness is a result of God's endowment of Grace to us. The benefits we claim are not even our own, but HIS. Those benefits are immeasurable and, in the end, all that benefits Christ benefits those of us who are IN Christ.

".....and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life" What are those steps which we beg to follow? Those steps lead us upon the wind-tossed Galilean seas and along its shorelines where many needy people are gathered begging for mercy. They lead us in out-of-the-way places such as to a Well outside the gates of Sychar. They lead us into public conflict with wicked rulers and erroneous religious teachers. They lead us into the Wilderness of Life to be tempted of the Devil. They lead us into the public square to defend a helpless woman against her hate-mongering accusers. They lead us into the House of Praise and Worship and may require us to clean it out of commercialism. They lead us to a sorrowful last supper with those we love and cherish. They lead us into the Garden of prayer and weeping. They lead us to the courtyard of our accusers who falsely label us as blasphemers. They lead us to the place of thorns and torture....to the Magistrate's false trial....to the cross – ever to the CROSS! They lead us to a BORROWED grave, and, finally, to a glorious

resurrection with Christ! That daily endeavoring which prompts us to the paths of righteousness is also evidence of the free grace of God which is ever flowing into our cups and causing them to overflow.....".....*my Cup runneth over.*" Speed the day that the heavens shall be rolled back as a scroll, and we shall behold the Fountain of our Salvation descending for us with the white-robed Armies of Heaven. AMEN.