



The Second Sunday after The Epiphany.

The Collect.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

In one of the most notable sculptures of Auguste Roden, the artist portrays, in stone, the hand of God creating and molding the form of man from a large chunk of earth. The man is nearly complete in form, yet much remains of the lump suggesting that our physical bodies alone do not constitute our complete person, and much more remains of man o e perfected than the mere outward form. Much of the mass remains to illustrate the imperfection of man in his fallen state, but is shown to indicate that God intends continually to perfect man after His own Image. This work suggests that we are never a finished product until God has put the finishing touch on our countenance. That is my humble analysis of the work, and I hope Auguste Roden would have agreed with it since he is its creator.

The great debate taking place in Job is between the belief in a works-oriented faith, and that of a faith based upon grace and faith. The three friends are on the side of salvation and prosperity by works, and Job on the side of salvation by grace alone. Which side do you believe to be that of Jesus Christ? *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.* (John 9:1-3) The modern day Pharisees and prosperity preachers still profess that sickness comes as a result of sin, and poverty from an unwholesome relationship with God. Just as Roden portrays the Hand of God molding man from a lump of clay, so it is true that we are all clay in the Hands of the Potter and unable to add a single inch to our stature. If it seems good to create a little baby without vision for His own purpose, so be it. The clay cannot dictate to the Potter. There are untold numbers of the young who were born with some disabling defect – either mental or physical – who have come shining through to bless all who know them, and to the glory of God. Had he been conceived in our day, even the sickly Beethoven would have been murdered through abortion ere he saw the light of day, or a single note of music graced his lonely heart.

Job begins his discourse with firm and steady conviction. Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations. Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on. The gift of speech is remarkable blessing. It has great power if the Words originate from on high. Have you thanked God lately for this simple and useful gift that some do not possess? Really? When was the last time? Just how important is this gift? For speech to be profitable there must be ears to hear it: So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17) If faith cometh by hearing, then the tongue that spoke the Words must be very important! Job was not present in the Council of Heaven to hear the challenge between God and Satan. He does not fully understand why he is living in such dire straits; however, he does know God, and the God Job knows is not profited by the trifling works of man. God does not desire our insincere words spoken from pride, or our moldy old church buildings built on the backs of widows and orphans. God desire one, only, sacrifice from us: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalms 51:17)

⁴ As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled? ⁵ Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth. ⁶ Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh. I recall to memory so many incidences in which God has ruled in the affairs of individuals who have mightily offended His Holiness. In almost every case, the one who has perverted justice does not realize the unseen Hand that has brought a severe retribution. But the righteous, too, may seldom see the misery that follows in the tracks of sin. We look upon the wealthy that need not labor, but live in opulence – an opulence created by robbing the poor or the unwise. We cannot see the fevered heart beneath the silken robes that are troubled night and day in greed for more – always MORE! If this is not a living hell, I do not know what is! They cannot appreciate the roses by the wayside, or the innocent smile of a little child, for their hearts are set on the filthy lucre and filth of the city refuse. Job knows the Hidden Hand and trembles at the thought. The ungodly know so little of truth, but what they do not know will lead to their doom.

⁷ Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? ⁸ Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. ⁹ Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. ¹⁰ Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. ¹¹ They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. ¹² They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. ¹³ They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Job now takes his strong position of the immutable truths of God which diametrically oppose those of his friends. The wicked do, indeed, often fair very well in this life – more often than the righteous are they blessed with possessions. Why is this so? Why do you suppose honest and good men do not usually run for public office, and when they do, why do they most often lose? It is because the righteous are restrained in their words by truth and honesty. The wicked are not. Slander and libel are the tools of their trade – so they prosper with an unfair advantage. They often live long lives in prosperity of the world, and die suddenly without pain. Must I remind you that their prosperity ends abruptly at graveside? Remember the Rich Man and Lazarus? There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the

beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (Luke 16:19-23) Would we prefer the fires of hell to the escort of angels?

How do the world and her governments view the LORD? They expend constant effort to expunge every vestige of His Name and worship from every public square. They attempt to vanquish his Name from the minds of the young forbidding prayer and Bible reading. They attempt to eradicate every reference to His Divine Hand in their founding as a nation...God forbid! What shall become of such a nation and people who have known His grace, and finally rejected it? ¹⁴ *Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* ¹⁵ *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?* Job observes, astutely, the exact state of affairs in our modern world. If evil was such as it was 3,500 years ago, then it has had a long spell to hone its ways into greater sophistication. Their ways are in a constant flux, but the man whose heart is stayed upon Christ has a steady focus. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.* (Isaiah 26:3) ¹⁷ *How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger.*

The wicked truly do become stubble in the path of the Lord. It is always fascinating to me to note that God often leaves out the name of the wicked (as in the Rich Man – no name – and Lazarus – name). The wicked have no names in Hell, but the righteous have a new and spotless name written down in the Book of Life in Heaven. Perhaps the Pharisees who brought the woman taken in adultery to Christ saw, that day, their names written on the earth: *O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.* (Jer 17:13) Job goes on to say: ¹⁸ *They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away.* ¹⁹ *God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it.* ²⁰ *His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty.* The wicked leave a morass of spiritual wickedness and an evil heritage for their children. Only by the grace of God do some overcome the debts owed by the fathers.

²¹ *For what pleasure hath he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst?* I read of a wealthy financier who died in New York. A reporter asked the dead man's friend, "How much did he leave, sir?" "He LEFT it all," was the response. How greatly that principle differs from the death of the righteous! When a righteous man or woman dies, what do THEY leave? They leave not a mite! All of their treasure is on deposit in Heaven where they go to reclaim it.

²² *Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are high.* No, I do not believe any mortal can teach a single thought to God Almighty! But do they not try – especially high-born theologians who have discovered 'errors' in the Bible? The so-called 'Higher Critics' (low as hell itself) attempt to use their presumed intellect to define a different God and Bible than we have known. They know more than Holy Scripture itself about the nature of our God who flung the stars into space and created the earth and all of its habitation; yet, these 'great scholars cannot even create a flea, or define light. They are a dozen marbles short of a ten marble load!

23 One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. 24 His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. 25 And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. 26 They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them. For the wealthy wicked, their present physical being is all that they have. When their bodies lie, as John Brown's, a moldering in the grave, the only possession they can claim is a rotting carcass and several hundred head of worms. THAT'S IT! But all the dead shall share the common destiny. If that destiny is not heaven, then it is the grave (which shall be cast, along with hell, into the Lake of Fire). But what of the righteous dead? "...*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" (1 Cor 15:54)

27 Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me. 28 For ye say, Where is the house of the prince? and where are the dwelling places of the wicked? 29 Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, Why have they not asked these evil predecessors that go the way of Cain? Because they go into the dark abyss never to speak to man again. 30 That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. 31 Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done? There comes a day when the King shall call all into His Court for an accounting and a settlement. Burdened with debts of sin and wickedness, where shall the evil heart stand, and what shall be his defense? What terrible debt shall be extracted on the Day of Woe? 32 Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb. 33 The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him. The greatest 'sweetness' of the grave will not be sugar, but clods of earth. The long black train continues ahead as it has proceeded in the past. Innumerable souls line the path to the grave, and many fill the gaping abyss.

34 How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood? Can false counsel benefit a man in the throes of misery? Can white lies smooth the long march to the grave? Does a half-hearted friend benefit by always ignoring the sorrowful truth in favor of a pleasant lie?

This Book of Job gets better, and better, with the reviving spirit of Job's faith and love for God.