



WHEN the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matt 25:31-46)

The modern church, and perhaps the church of all ages, has been crowded with profligate sinners whose sins go unrepented. “How can that be?” you may ask. Have we

committed adultery in the past week, embezzled money, killed someone, lied outrageously in gossip, dishonored father or mother, worshipped idols, or profaned the Sabbath Day? Perhaps we have not done so in the past week, but it is likely that we have done all, or most, of these sins at some point; however, my focus is not on those overt and cardinal sins that describe the bare naked sinner in the eyes of the Lord. My focus today is borne out in the daily morning and evening prayer that good Anglicans should say twice each day – A General Confession contained in those two services in the Book of Common Prayer, as well as a particular category of sin referenced in the above passage from Matthew 25.

You may wonder why Anglicans recite prayers that are passed down in written form from the early church? It is because these prayers apply to every Christian at every moment of his life. It is not a contrived prayer repeated on the spur of the moment out of the imagination of a congregant that may, or may not, reflect the needs and petitions of all present; but applies equally to every member of the congregation. These are communal, or corporate, prayers much like the Lord's Prayer which begins with "OUR Father" – not "MY Father." The General Confession is one such prayer. If we examine this prayer closely, we will know with certainty that every line pertains to us corporately and individually. If you disagree, tell me which part you would expunge from the prayer.

A General Confession.

¶ *To be said by the whole Congregation, after the Minister, all kneeling.*

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; *We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind In Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

"ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father." This is the Being to whom we address our every prayer if we expect an answer. "We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep." Who among us has not! Just as those merciless Jewish leaders who brought the woman caught in the very act of adultery dropped their stones and departed at the strong counsel of our Lord: *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.* (John 8:7-9) That woman must have, from that moment, loved the Lord with all her heart – and we all were that woman! Yes, we have all erred and strayed from the ways of the Lord, but grace aplenty is available to those who appeal to His grace and mercy for forgiveness.

"We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws." Our so-called 'free wills' belong to Satan and the world, but those who have taken upon themselves that Mind which was in Christ have the perfect law of liberty in their hearts. Still we fall and falter. Who among us has not committed sin in the last month, week, day, or even hour – unless we have been sound asleep?

“We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done;” Herein lies the crux and focus of my devotion to the Church today. Read again the introductory text from Matthew 25.

“ . . . he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” I sadly suggest to you, friends, that perhaps as much as 90% of those on the church roles will be accounted among the goat-side of that equation. Why? What sins have they committed? I aver that the greater sins of the goat-side church members is not the sins they have committed, but those acts of love and mercy that they have omitted. Those are the ones our Lord addresses to them in this passage. The sins mentioned in our General Confession are two only – sins of commission, and sins of OMISSION. The righteous will be moved by Christ-like compassion to offer love and mercy to the downtrodden, the sick, the widow, orphan, and prisoner. The unrighteous, who are Christians in name only, will omit to help such ones even if their lives appear above reproach insofar as open sin is concerned.

What does Christ say to those who omit to do those things that are evidence of a Christ-like believer? *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.* (Matthew 25:41-45)

The Samaritan on the Road from Jericho was one despised by the Jews, yet it was only the Samaritan, and not the Jewish religious, who stopped to help the Jew who was robbed and broken at the point of death. We need no purple robes or silken garments to reflect the love of God. We may even be poor and famished of hunger ourselves, but offer our last mite to help another in need. That defines the saint of God. Love and mercy compels ACTION! Our Lord did not merely feel sorry for those who were lame, blind, lepered, or deaf – He ALWAYS had compassion on them which results from a love that overrules every other emotion.

Why is the church sick, and many sleep? *“And there is no health in us.”* No health at all in those who are separated by lack of love or zeal for God. In fact, they are *“dead in trespasses and sin”* according to Ephesians 2. A dead man cannot help others, and he certainly can do no good works for himself. True life ruled by love.

What remedy for those who are dead in spirit? In spite of our faltering failures, there is an answer of hope: *“But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind In Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.”* We can never be accepted by God until we confess our sins and realize that we can never be “good enough” by our own meritorious acts to earn salvation. It is all an act of grace. The Holy Ghost imbues us with the faith needful for salvation – even that is no work of our own doing. So, if we are feeling righteous, we are lost already. We must know that we are accepted by God, not by our own righteousness, but by the imputed righteousness of Christ. If we are Christians, we shall reflect the values and personality of our dear Savior – to love, to act for others, to proclaim His unmerited mercy, and to not fail to commit acts of love and mercy toward others. The greater sins of the church

today are those sins of omission referenced in our General Confession and by our Lord in the text from Matthew 25!