

Devotion on the Collect for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity Sunday - 6 November 2012 Anno Domini



The Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity
The Collect.

LORD we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

3. Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)

This Collect well summarizes the first five verses of Psalms 46: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.*

First, we note that the Church is not ours, but is the Household of God into which we are privileged to be called and chosen. It is not a prison, but a fortress. So what is the difference? Both a prison and a fortress are constructed of strong stone walls, high and guarded. Both enclosed a space to be occupied by a particular population. There are attempts at both to break through the walls and gates. ".....*the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*" (Matt 11:12) It may be possible to break through the walls of a prison, but not through the walls of the Church: ".....**upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**" (Matt 16:18) The Church, our fortress, is designed to protect against the evils of the world; but a prison (the world) is designed to keep its occupants in bondage.

Secondly, we note that the Church is to be in continual Godliness. We are not to enjoy moments of weeks of revival of Spirit and then sink back into mediocrity, but we are to continually practice Godliness! Sir Edmund Bowes states the matter in lovely and reliable terms: "*What is Godliness? Conformity to the mind and will of God, - having the heart and eye turned towards God. See such expressions as, 'a good conscience towards God,' (1 Peter 3:21); 'faith to Godward,' (1 Thessalonians 1:8); and 'trust through Christ to God-ward,' (2 Cor 3:4); 'alive unto God,' (Romans 6:11). See how references to God is interwoven with Holy things? We read of 'Godly sorrow,' - 'Godly fear,' - 'Godly sincerity,' - 'Godly zeal,' - 'Godly men,' - 'Godly edifying,' - 'the doctrine according to Godliness,' - 'the Godly Seed,' - 'Godly jealousy,' etc. In the New Testament, the word GODLINESS is used frequently by St Paul, and by him chiefly in 1st and 2nd Timothy, - ten times in ten chapters. Was this because they were (with the Epistles to Titus) probably the last he wrote? As if the nearer he came to the end of his course, the more he viewed things with reference to God and Godliness.*" It is true of all Christians, I believe, that they grow wiser in Lord with advancing age. The sanctification process is being worked out in their lives in time to be ready and desirous to be rid of the troubles of the world and go to the blessings of Christ.

Thirdly, we note God is our Fortress and Protector. Though we fear Him as a child fears to disappoint a loving Father, we do not fear Him as an enemy who wills to destroy our souls. The enemy of our souls remains without the Fortress (Church, or should) and cannot gain an entrance by breaching our strong walls. Well did the good Martin Luther sum up the protecting power of God and His Church in his greatest of all hymns – A Mighty Fortress is our God. That hymn is powerful because that hymn incorporates, in its every line, biblical truth:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevaling.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?*

*Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth, his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours,
thru him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.*

Lastly, we note the Church is to be characterized by devotion and good works. If the Church is the 'Salt of the Earth,' it must be shaken often else it will clog together and not be able of being applied sparingly. If the Church becomes clannish, with little groups forming with personal agendas here and there, it will become like that saltshaker whose salt has hardened and become unusable. Have you used your salt today?