

Wednesday after the 5th Sunday after Pentecost/4th Sunday after Trinity, 2020 A.✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Chief Priests and the elders “confronted” the Lord, the Scriptures record. Theirs was not a polite inquiry. They demanded an answer. They believed that only they had the authority to do what the Lord was doing. They believed that the authority they had was God given. They asserted their authority in calling Him to account for His actions.

But they had no authority over Him. Their offices were instituted by Him. So to their demand for an answer, He gives no answer. Instead He responds with a question regarding authority. “The baptism of John – where was it from? From heaven or from men?” Like sleazy politicians they were more concerned with their popularity than with the Truth. Given John’s popularity, fearing men, they could not answer “from men.”

As proud, egocentric men, men who attributed their authority and office to a Divine source, since they opposed Him, they could not answer “from heaven.” So Truth silences pride. Truth defeats the attacks of craftiness. True authority doesn’t need to advertise itself. Unbelief has no answer before God. Fallen man’s feebleness is laid bare with one Word of God. They had no authority.

Every sin can be seen as questioning God’s authority. Every sin can be seen as the belief that the authority of fallen man exceeds the authority of God. Men know well, by natural revelation and by special revelation, what God prohibits and what God requires. To break His commandments is to attempt to usurp God’s authority and subordinate it to your own.

The Christ knew the answer to the Jews’ questions. But He would not give answer because of their sinfulness. Imagine, then, the consequence of your sin before God. What should God say to you in light of your sin? What answer should He give you who have rejected His authority and sinned against Him, whether by commission or omission? What should God’s answer to you be, or better put, what should your sentence be?

In unbelief, the Jews could not give answer. But St. Paul, the Pharisee *par excellence* converted to the Truth by a personal Theophany, St. Paul, sent immediately by the Risen Christ to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, answers the question of the chief priests and elders. They asked “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”

Paul, Pharisee of Pharisees, student of Gamaliel, writes that the same Christ who silenced them with His question is “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” That is His authority. That is His power. That can only be true of God Himself. The Christ is God.

But Paul writes after the Lord’s Ascension into heaven. As the Lord stood before Paul’s Jewish colleagues, He stood in His state of humiliation, the symbols and signs of His power and authority hidden for a time, willingly put off, the Son inferior to God the Father as touching His

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manhood. But He was nonetheless God, fully God, equal to God the Father and to the Holy Ghost as touching His Godhead.

His answer, His answer to the chief priests and the elders, to Paul, to Jew and Gentile, His answer to you, and to all fallen men, is given on the cross. There is the answer to your sinfulness. In the death and resurrection of Christ is the answer that silences the prince of this world. His authority is this: No one took His life from Him, but He lay it down of Himself. He alone has power to lay it down, and He alone has power to take it up again.

Love needs no authority, for against love there is no Law. And yet true Love has all authority. In love, He died for you. He lay down His life, and took it up again. He alone could do this of Himself. He is Love Incarnate, Love poured out from heaven upon you. That is His authority.

And God the Father, pleased with the Sacrifice of His Son, put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. That is where His authority meets you. That is where His love meets you.

For here, in the Church, what Christ is and what Christ won is applied to you, freely given to you, made yours. His holiness, His righteousness, His sinlessness, is made yours. So you are forgiven in Christ. Your sins are removed. You are reconciled to God. And you receive the Spirit of Truth.

By that Spirit, you give answer to God in the words of the Creed. You believe in God, the Father almighty. You believe in Jesus Christ His Son. You believe in the Holy Spirit, because the same Spirit worked faith in you in your baptism, faith in the Son the Father sent. And by that faith, you give answer to God, the answer of faith, which is to pray “Thy will be done.”

You know the answer that the Chief Priests and elders could not know. For by the Holy Scriptures, you know that John’s baptism was from heaven, a Divinely commanded washing to prepare the Way of the One who would baptize with water and the Spirit for the forgiveness of sins.

And by faith you know, in the greatest of Mysteries, that while John’s baptism was from heaven given through men, God Himself, King of Heaven, became Man to be baptized by John and to shed His Blood for you. Knowing that, believing that, trusting in Him for your salvation, you have the wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.

And you know the hope of His calling, the hope of everlasting life. You know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, the salvation of your souls, and the Testament in His Blood that makes you an heir of heaven.

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