

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

Jeremiah spoke the Word of the Lord to an apostate Judah and her idolatrous king. A horrible Word it was: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My Pasture!” And to God’s chosen among the Judahites the Prophet spoke this Divinely inspired Word: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord.”

Those false prophets came vested as servants of God. They claimed to speak for God. Their oracles they attributed to a Holy and Divine source. But their words betrayed them. They taught neither the Word of God nor His Truth. They taught the vain imaginings of men. They taught peace as Babylon sharpened her sword.

So the Lord convicts them publicly, saying “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.” They came not from God, but from the devil. They came not to nurture and protect the flock, but to scatter it for their own profit. Even so, the people hearkened to the false prophets. They preferred their flattering words. Sinful teachings make sense to sinners.

Six hundred years later, the Promised Christ spoke the same Word to the His disciples: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” And against those who would hearken to the words of the false prophets, the Lord declares “Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

These are hard Words, strong Words, Words of condemnation and wrath, Words that cleave and divide. The Lord Christ Himself says that in the visible church there are false pastors and false Christians. They are, like Judah’s false prophets, fruit of a bad tree. And to them heaven is closed.

That should strike fear in the hearts of all who hear the Lord’s Words. For if you are honest, you must confess that you too have borne bad fruit. The very things the Lord declares to be sin you have done. And the things the Lord commands that you do, you have not always done. And on some level, a fleshly level, the doctrines of false Christians and unbelievers have made sense to you, because sinful teaching makes sense to sinners. The flesh prefers flattery to God’s Law.

So in our society perversion is taught as right and good, even by those who use the name Christian. Churches ordain women, although the Scriptures prevent it. Congregations open their altars and give Holy Things to those who are not holy at all. Infanticide is called “choice”.

The account of creation so clearly presented in Genesis is counted as foolishness by the wise men of this age, even in the visible church, for the Word of God is foolishness to those who are perishing. Most men do not believe in the True God. Most men reject God’s Word, and few are those who study and learn it.

And truth be told, the doctrines and temptations of the fallen have seemed reasonable to your flesh. Most men live in the way, and by the doctrine, the false preachers preach. It is comfortable to fallen reason. It is considered wisdom in this sinful world.

But hear the Word of the Lord, O Fleshly Man: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Hear too the Word of the Apostle, given by the Spirit of the Living God: “If you live according to the flesh, you will die.”

False pastors, false christians, works that lead to death. They are all around you. But do not despair, O Redeemed of Christ. Do not be afraid, O you who have been given true faith, saving faith. Take heart, beloved of the Lord. For in His mercy, in His grace, in His superabundant love for you, the Lord gives you sure ways to determine the Truth.

That you not doubt, He provides for His Church visible, concrete Marks, by which you can be confident that the Word you hear is the Saving Word of God, the Hammer that breaks the rock into pieces, the Word that unites you to God as One, the Word not of wolves but of the only true Good Shepherd.

The Marks of the Church are visible, for all men to see. That you be saved, God gives His Holy Word preached in its purity. It is there, in the Holy Scriptures, and there alone, that the True God is revealed. It is there, in the Holy Scripture, and there alone, that you learn of the Holy Trinity, of the Incarnation of God the Son, of His crucifixion and resurrection. It is there that you learn that what He did He did for you, that your sins be forgiven, and that you be brought to saving faith in Him by the Spirit’s power.

And the same Lord blesses His Church, the True Church, the sum total of all those with saving faith in Him. He bless you, dear Christian, with the Holy Sacraments administered according to the Institution of the Lord who gives them. Where these are present, where Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Holy Eucharist are, there is salvation, forgiveness, and everlasting life. For where these are present, Christ is present – Christ is present for you.

And so there, at the altar where pure doctrine and the Sacraments are, so too are true Pastors, and true Christians, gathered around the Saving Gifts of God, the true Flock hearkening to the voice of her Shepherd. And where these blessed Mysteries are, where these blessed vehicles of the Holy Gospel are, where Christ is brought to you, there the Spirit of God works to create faith, for the Gospel gives the very faith it requires. And where the Gospel is, there the Lord of the Church is present, to feed and protect His Flock, the Holy Bride of Christ, the True Church.

For if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. And where the Spirit of God is, there are only Good Fruits, and there the will of God the Father is done, so there is the Kingdom of Heaven – here, dear baptized of Christ, here in this house of God, here at this altar, here among you and in you for you for your forgiveness, for your salvation, and for eternal life.

Through Holy Baptism you received the Spirit of adoption. So it is you who cry out “Abba, Father” as you pray in faith “Our Father, who art in heaven...” And as the Lord of the Church promises through the Apostle, as children of God you are heirs, heirs of God and co- heirs with Christ. You are the True Church, the Invisible Church, the Church that is the congregation of all those with saving faith in Jesus Christ. So yours is the Promise: as an heir of God you will be kept safe in this life, will be glorified together with Christ in the resurrection.

St. Matthew 7:15-21

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity/Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, 2018 A.✠ D.

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