

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

The Lord's Words as recorded by his hearer and disciple St. Matthew ask you to consider an important question, a question that has eternal consequences: what informs your faith? From where do you get what you believe about God? What is the source of what you hold to be true about life, death, eternity, sin, grace, justice, and salvation? The twisted, fallen world and its sages certainly rush in to catechize you. The godless desire to bring you into their fold, to use peer pressure and mass media to conform your beliefs to their dogma.

And yet if you look closely at the fruits of their religion, at the actions that result from what they believe, you see that they hold human life to be worthless, perversion to be normal, gender to be fluid, man to be a servant of creation, the creation as a mystical yet frail deity, and man to be the ultimate answer to all of his own problems.

The intelligentsia of this corrupt world demand belief in their dogma absent proof, indeed often contrary to proof, which is to demand blind faith in their teachings, over against all others. So, while mocking those who believe in God and railing against true religion, fallen men create their own religion, making themselves the inscrutable source and norm of truth.

So who have you believed? Is perversion good and right? Can a child in the womb be extinguished for the convenience of the mother? Is man made for the earth, or the earth for man? Is faith in the God of the Bible the sign of an intellectual handicap? Who have you believed, the God who made man, or the man who rejects God? Have you hearkened to the prophets of this fallen world? Hear then the Word of the only true God, the Judge of all men, to whom all men will bow:

“I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied”, says the Lord through the Prophet Jeremiah. “They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord.” And the Incarnate Lord, teaching His disciples, warns them: “Beware of false prophets.” And that they be able to identify false prophets, the Lord continues: “by their fruits you will know them”.

The Lord uses the illustration of a tree and its fruit. A bad tree doesn't bear good fruit. Bad fruit is an external sign of a bad tree. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? The answer, of course, is “No”. It would be foolish to try. And more than going away hungry, you might well be harmed.

Why, then, would you listen to the doctrines of the godless? For of bad fruit, of lawlessness, of promiscuity, of lasciviousness, of unbelief, of perversion, of disregard for the sanctity of God-given life, of lust and greed and worship of the creation and man playing god, the only True God says “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire.”

And while the tree and fruit are a metaphor, that fire is not. It is not a simile. It is not a parable. Consuming fire will come on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, fire that cannot be extinguished. And all those who followed the false prophets of this world will know the searing

heat of that fire, fire without end, joining the rich man in his lament: “I am tormented in this flame...”

That you avoid that torment, the Lord teaches you to judge. He directs you to discern. He teaches you to consider the fruits, and to judge if they are good or bad. In that way you will know whether their source is good or bad. But how can you tell good fruit from bad? Only by the Word of God. And that Word, the very speaking of the God who made man, is written only in Holy Scripture. Hear then God speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah: “Is not my Word like a fire? And like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces?”

It is His Word alone that shatters the stony heart and brings forth faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His Word that shows the false prophets to be liars, and offers the saving Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So do not hearken to false teaching, even from those who claim to speak in the Lord’s Name. Do not conform your life to the ways of the fallen world. Discern the fruits. Hearken to what is truly Good. For there alone will you find the Good Fruit of the Good Tree.

God has given you His Word that you may read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word that expresses His will. He clearly tells you the difference between good and evil, between fruit pleasing to Him and the fruit that poisons your soul. He does it in love, in mercy, that you not be fooled, that you have a trustworthy measure to discern falsehood from Truth, and that you believe the Truth.

A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. But the Lord teaches of an important corollary, indeed, a salvific Truth that is an outcome of that which He has already proved to be true: a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. And there, on Golgotha, hanging from the tree, do you find the Fruit that is truly Good. There is the Fruit who did only good, who taught only Truth, who was perfectly faithful, whose worship was pure, who rightly loved and honored God, and who truly and perfectly loved His neighbor.

There is the Fruit that makes that tree of death a tree of life for you, the very Tree of Life Himself, the Shoot from the stump of Jesse, the Root that grew out of dry ground, the Branch cut off from the living, the Royal Fruit that wore the thorn bush as a crown. There is the One wounded for your transgressions, the One bruised for your iniquities. The chastisement for your peace was upon Him, And by His stripes you are healed.

Therefore by His Fruits you will know Him – by His miraculous Resurrection, by Holy Absolution, by Holy Baptism, by the Holy Eucharist, and by the Office He ordains through which His Gifts come to you.

So do as your Lord bids: discern the fruits, for they point you to eternal life. Believe in Christ, believe His Word, for He is the True Prophet. Believe, and receive the Fruits that alone can save. For to you does He freely give His salvation, His righteousness, His mercy, His grace, and His Body and His Blood. He gives you the Fruits by which you are grafted into Him, the Life Giving Vine. So take and eat, take and drink, for by His Fruits you will know Him.

St. Matthew 7:15-23

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity / Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, 2019 A.✠ D.

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