

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

Great multitudes had seen the Lord's miracles, or heard reports of them. So it was that a multitude followed the Lord – men and women from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. When the multitude gathered, the Lord went up the mountain to speak.

But His great Sermon on the Mount, like the Great Commission before His ascension, wasn't spoken to the multitudes. He spoke to the small group of disciples He called unto Himself. And this morning you heard the Divine Words spoken to the Apostles, His Words of warning to them.

In love, in mercy, that they who were earthly understand heavenly truths, He spoke to them of wolves and trees and false Christians. The three teachings, the wolves, the trees, and the false Christians, have something in common. In fact, they are inseparable.

The false Christian may deceive even himself, but he can't deceive the Lord. On the Last Day, at the judgment, when they plead their case, He will say to them "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." It is a horrible sentence. It is an eternal sentence. The Lord warns the disciples that they, and you who hear their Spirit-given testimony, be saved.

Those who practice lawlessness will be condemned. That is the external sign of the lack of faith – lawlessness. Look at our country today. Hatred and division, dissension, violence, discord, profanity, strife, destruction, and sedition run rampant. Lawlessness is the wonton disregard for the clear commands of God, the command to love God above all things, the command to love your neighbor as yourself.

God is a God of order, a God of peace. Lawlessness and chaos are of the lawless one, the devil, the first anarchist, the first terrorist. But like all anarchists, rejecting ordered rule he lusted after power. And that lust for power, for notoriety, for fame, is in your flesh too. The Apostle writes of such lawlessness: "... brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die..."

But in mercy, that you not die, the God of Order, the Lord of Love, the Prince of Peace, went up on the mountain and taught His disciples. And they recorded His Words that you too learn from God. The Lord has given you the criteria by which to judge. "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit... Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

So in the same chapter in which the Lord says "Judge not", He directs you to judge. He directs you to judge – not the eternal status of the souls of men, for that is His to judge alone – but to judge the fruits of men, to judge their words and their works. For what men do is a visible confession of what men believe – an external sign of what resides internally, outward signs of what fills their heart.

So look to those around you. Do they bear godly fruit in their lives? Have you surrounded yourself with those who produce the good fruits of faith, saving faith in Christ our Lord? Do their words and actions bring glory to the only True God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost?

Good fruits are the works that God has established from eternity, works which the Spirit of the Living God leads you to do. They are the fruits of faith, the fruit of the Spirit. St. Paul writes to teach the Church about those fruits: "...the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, finding out what is acceptable to the Lord."

Good fruit, the fruit of faith, the fruit that is born of the heart filled with Christ, is to seek the will of God and do it. So the Apostle warns you: "... have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."

And after you have looked to others, which is easy, now look to yourself. Consider your works. Consider your words. Consider the thoughts you have had that have gone unspoken. Are they all good fruits? Are they pure, holy, undefiled, God-pleasing? Do they bring glory to God? Remember what the Apostle writes: "...if you live according to the flesh, you will die." And the Lord warns "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

The Lord taught his disciples that you be taught – taught of false Christians, of trees and of wolves. The wolves our Lord describes are not simply members of the congregation. True, they appear to be sheep, for they masquerade as sheep. But they are not simply false Christians. The wolves teach. The wolves preach.

They teach and preach false things about God. The wolves wear clerical collars and fill pulpits. They hold positions of authority in the visible church. They present themselves as those called by God to teach men about God. But they are not called by God.

So God says through the True Prophet, Jeremiah: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." But those ignorant of Holy Scripture believe what they teach, and on the Last Day men stand before God using His Name, and He says to them "I never knew you."

For they never truly knew Him. False doctrine is no plaything. False teachers aren't harmless. As the Prophet warns "They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord." So be on guard, dear Christian. Watch carefully. Take heed to yourself. Search the Scriptures. Judge. Look at the fruits. But do not despair, do not lose hope.

For the Apostles Words are Words for you: "...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. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

God, in His mercy, speaks through His Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists that you know the Truth. Knowing the Truth, you know God. To know God is to know Christ, Christ crucified for you. There, on the cross, pierced and lifeless, there do you see the extent of God's great love for you. And there do you see the fount and source of the forgiveness of all your sins.

In Christ there was nothing false, for He is Truth. In Christ, you see the True Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, who lay down His life to protect you, the sheep of His Flock, from the wolf. And there, on the tree of Golgotha, do you see the Good Fruit, the Perfect Fruit, the Fruit of the cross, that God the Son places with Bread and Wine this day for you to eat and drink.

He bids you who are washed in the washing of regeneration and renewal, the washing that gives the Holy Spirit, to kneel and receive Christ. In Him are your sins forgiven. In Him is your faith made strong. In Him you know the Truth, which is to know Christ, and to be known by Him.

Knowing the Truth, you live not for the flesh, but by the Spirit, who brings that saving Truth to you. Knowing the Truth you have the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that the world cannot give. Knowing the Truth, you know God. So on the Last Day when you stand before God, you will hear your Lord say “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

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