

Sermon - Candlemas (Feb. 2, 2012)

*“A light to lighten the Gentiles,
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.”*

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

I would like to begin by thanking the Near North Voices Chamber Choir for singing Evensong for us tonight, and I would especially like to thank their choir director, Dr. Adam Adler. Dr. Adler is not only long-suffering, but, I imagine, he also causes his choir to suffer long, for if it were not for the investment of time, energy, and talent—in other words, if the skills of all concerned had not been exercised—we would not be enjoying such splendid music this evening to aid our worship and contemplation of the Divine Beauty.

Exercise is suffering (at least it is for me), and so, Dr. Adler and choir, your suffering is our pleasure.

Speaking of suffering, Dr. Adler allegedly suffered last time I preached when his choir was present last November. Apparently I preached in his most least-favourite way whereby the preacher reiterates the Scripture reading a number of times in a few different ways. So as not to dash expectations, I propose extending the good doctor’s suffering to this evening. Already we have heard the same words repeated three times in three different ways. I propose to say these words again for a fourth time. Here they are:

*LORD, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy
salvation, which thou has prepared before the face of all
people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be
the glory of thy people Israel.*

Very intentionally, these words of Simeon are sung or said after the reading from the New Testament at Evening Prayer in the Anglican tradition. This is so because it is in the revelation of the New Testament that we come to know the life of God, and the life of God's people, in the light of this Divine light; this Anointed Messiah. The point of these words spoken by the aged Simeon is that his suffering is now complete; it is now over. As we hear in this evening's Second Lesson, the old man had been waiting to be consoled and for his people to be consoled, and now he who was long-suffering, actively waiting for peace, may now live the rest of his days and come to the end of his days in peace, knowing that all shall be well. With a light far brighter and more glorious than the sun, Christ sheds light on the

understanding of our hearts, of our minds, and of our souls, chasing away the shadows of fear and doubt; giving us His peace, surpassing and transcending all the ways in which we are confined to the disharmonious suffering of this earth. This is the experience of Simeon, holding the Light in his hands, and this, I pray, is our experience as well.

The Lord, speaking reassuringly through the prophet Haggai in the First Lesson, says that the glory of the new Temple will outshine that of the first. And the crown of that new shining glory, of course, is the appearance of Salvation Himself who graces the Temple with His very presence, who Himself is the perfect Temple of the Holy Spirit. Through Haggai, the Lord intends to set His people at ease: He wishes for them to

know that through their struggles and sufferings in rebuilding the Temple, His presence shall be with them. The Lord will give them His peace, and the Lord's promises shall be fully fulfilled in the arms of Simeon when Jesus is presented to His Heavenly Father for dedication to His service.

Suffering is certainly common to humanity, and so the desire to rest in peace from that suffering is also common to our lot. We are often like Simeon holding our breath, waiting for our consolation; waiting for our salvation; waiting for our healing. So where is it?

In the first psalm sung this evening, number eighty-four, we hear the psalmist praising the Lord for the loveliness of His dwellings; His courts; His altars; His house. There is a temple; a sanctuary of peace where

we may, with Simeon and Anna, rest our hearts. In the midst of our pain, we find a peace that no thing can offer and which no mortal can give—We “going through the Vale of Misery” (or “the Valley of Misery”) now “use it for a well.” In other words, it is in and through the misery of our experiences—in and through our suffering—that we find our consolation, for without darkness there can be no perceiving of light. “Blessed are the men who strength is in thee, in whose heart are the pilgrim ways; Who going through the Vale of Misery use it for a well; yea, the early rain covereth it with blessings.” Our God does not simply wave a magic wand and remove us from our sufferings: rather, He transforms our misery into joy, using it for our good. We taste refreshment for our souls on the pilgrim journey

towards the City of God, on the trail of life with all its ups and downs, because we turn aside to His Presence to be refreshed. We who are living temples of the Holy Spirit are called to open ourselves up in the midst of our sufferings and offer room for the Presence of God to dwell with us and give us His peace.

Consider this. The pleasure of singing and of hearing can only be achieved by the sacrifice of a singer and a choir such as the one we have been blessed with this evening—and so it is by our individual and corporate struggles that pleasure emerges. When we go to great pains, the Lord intends to transform our sweat and tears into something beautiful for our good and that of others. The Lord completes our suffering by giving it a point and a meaning so that it is not wasted, so that we,

too, may live and die in peace. So let us now turn aside to Him and find in Him our peace and consolation, allowing Him to take ourselves into His hands to be moulded by the refining fire of His love. Light can and will be shone through us because of our turning towards it and by resting in it, and we, in turn, will be lights to the world, shining in the midst of darkness.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, both now and for evermore.

Father A. E. Nussey