



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

Pentecost 8 – Year A; July 30, 2017
“Lose not the things eternal”

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Canon in Residence

From the Second Letter of Paul to the people at Corinth:

“So we do not lose heart. . .because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” [2 Cor 4:16,18].

This is this text which provides the inspiration for the wonderful 1000-year old collect for today in which we pray, “...that with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal”.

“Lose not the things eternal”. We should make a poster of this and each one of us put it up in his/her home: “Lose not the things eternal”.

The things eternal have taken quite a beating in our society of late. Virtue seems in scant evidence: faith, hope, and love seem not to be the guiding principles of the society in which we live.

We answer the question, ‘How can I get more?’ with the idea that it depends on others getting less. Loyalty is trumpeted as the highest, indeed perhaps the only, cardinal virtue; faith, hope, and love, which have served us well for two millennia as the three cardinal virtues of our faith are being set aside.

Now, I believe in loyalty. I believe that it is desperately important to be loyal: loyal to one’s friends, loyal to one’s country; loyal to one’s neighbors, and, of course, loyal to one’s God. But I do not believe that loyalty *is* one’s God.

I believe that loyalty *to* one’s God is that loyalty out of which all other goods flow. But I also know that you can be loyal to false gods. You can make a God out of things temporal; things of the moment, or the age or the century, or the locale, or the language, or the race, or the family, or the wealth, or the laws, or the knowledge, or the allegiance, or the leader.

Right now, we are holding on to a whole fistful of things temporal. We are holding on to our antagonisms, our prejudices, our interpretations, our divisions, our entitlements, our systems, and, God help us, our religions. (God, I remind you, has no religion.)

To be sure, some of the things temporal which we grasp so firmly are good, even if we are having to struggle to keep a firm grip on them. But we have become obsessed by more that are not good than them that are. We have set aside the things eternal in order to spend almost all of our time glued to media that feed us the grain for the gristmill of division.

Our leadership fails us by accepting this as a reasonable way of governing a nation. A few John the Baptists cry out in the wilderness, but their voices are hard to hear and often drowned out by the sound of slamming doors; doors that lead to rooms filled with the like-minded.

What has happened to the things eternal? What has happened to the things that cannot be seen? What has happened to faith, hope, and love, those cardinal virtues of which Paul wrote so compellingly to the people at Corinth?

It must become at least a goodly part of our vocation in these times both to practice and to preach those virtues. We are teetering on the brink of a virtueless society, a society wherein the powerful and the mighty are coming closer to serving only the powerful and the mighty.

Since our elected government seems hardly able to govern itself, let alone a nation, we may need to speak our words of hope and faith in simple, straight-forward ways that define our expectations in terms of their tenures.

We need to speak in love to those whose lives seem left behind in our new world and whose hopes we can all see may well be crushed. Many of them will need many of us to be good Samaritans and generous benefactors as our leaders cross over to the other side of the road and pass them by.

But that is not enough!

We must also become vocal advocates for the truth; for truth, like faith, hope, and love, is a virtue, a thing eternal. A thing eternal that those obsessed by the expedient goods of the moment, the things temporal, would very much like to see disappear into a darkness of hiddenness, ignorance, and even barbarity.

When our own President advocates ‘roughing up’ some prisoners to one of our own Long Island police forces, we can see how endangered are the things eternal. When he advocates unswerving loyalty at the biggest gathering of some of our best young people, we cannot fail them by saying and doing nothing.

We think that the worst can’t happen here simply because we have a noble tradition of shared responsibility. Well, permission has been given by conduct at the highest level, for the worst to come to the fore. This is no longer a political issue, it has become a Christian moral issue. The things eternal are under threat.

The collect for today reminds us that we have only one ruler, only one guide. That ruler and that guide is God as revealed to us in Jesus our Lord.

In the words of the Revelation to John: “*O ruler of the universe, Lord God, great deeds are they that you have done, surpassing human understanding. Your ways are ways of righteousness and truth, O King of all the ages.*”
[Rev. 15:3].

In the face of a torrent of expletives and the innuendos of rolling eyes and hateful gestures, let us demand righteousness and a devotion to truth, not opinion; love, not hate; justice not cruelty.

Make today's prayer the prayer of this moment in time:

“O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal. . .”