

Easter III

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[0 : 00] Jesus said to his disciples, words from this morning's gospel lesson in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

The Book of Common Prayer is the foundation of Anglo-Catholic spirituality. When utilized intentionally and attentively, it is a helpful instrument for the renewing of our mind and the building up of our faith.

It grounds us in the knowledge of Scripture, sound doctrine, and prayer to coincide with the church's mind and life. If you are using the prayer book this way, you will no doubt notice that the lessons appointed for these first three Sundays after Easter teach us something very important.

They teach us we cannot bask in the glow of Jesus' resurrection. This is most noticeable in the lessons appointed for the epistles.

On the first Sunday, the lesson from 1 John begins, Whosoever is born of God overcomes the world. Last week's lesson from 1 Peter chapter 2 begins, This is thankworthy if a man for conscience' sake toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

[1 : 26] And this morning's lesson also from 1 Peter 2 begins, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

Rather than allow us to bask, the appointed lessons call us to action. We are to overcome. We are to endure grief.

We are to abstain from the lusts of the flesh. These lessons exhort, Christ is risen. Go now and live out this truth.

Or as St. Paul states it in Romans 13, 12, In this, the prayer book is being faithful to Jesus' instructions.

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles and 500 others over a period of 40 days before he ascended into heaven. Before he ascended, he told them, saying Luke chapter 24, verse 49, Tarry until you were endued with power from on high.

[2 : 42] Jesus said to his disciples, They could only bask in the glory of his bodily resurrection and ascension for a short period of time. Once they were endued with the power from the promised Holy Ghost on Pentecost, 10 days after the ascension, they were to get busy and to be his witnesses in the world.

This same commission is what these prayer book lessons are exhorting us to. In baptism, we are empowered by the Holy Ghost through water.

Ephesians chapter 5, verses 15 and 16 has significant application for us today.

It states, See then that you walk circumspectly. In Greek, this means accurately, diligently. We are to walk circumspectly, not as wise, but as fools, redeeming or reclaiming the time, because the days are evil.

The days have long passed when we can rely on the moral fabric of society to support the practice of orthodox, evangelical Christianity. Heck, today we can't rely on society to determine whether a child is a boy or a girl, or whether a baby should live or die.

[4 : 21] Today, good is called evil, and evil is called good. Because this is so, we must urgently heed St. Paul's exhortation in Philippians 2, 15 and 16, and be blameless and harmless, children of God without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of truth.

I know the concern. We are small, with few resources, and little influence. Well, under Gideon's leadership, God conquered an army of Midianites with 300 faithful Israelites holding clay pots.

He turned the entire Roman Empire upside down, beginning with 12 apostles. This is how Paris' mission works.

You and I worship and learn the faith, and then go live it and share it with others. Jesus isn't expecting this Paris to conquer the whole world for the gospel, not the APA or the whole continuum for that matter.

But he does expect us to strive towards conquering ourselves. He expects us to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, as 2 Corinthians 10, 5 states.

[5 : 52] Jesus doesn't expect us to go to every creature in the world, but he does expect us to go to everyone within our sphere of influence, our children and grandchildren, extended family and our friends, our neighbors and social network, the clerk at the market, the teller at the bank.

He expects us to bring the gospel to them. I hear this objection too, but I'm not good at telling others about Jesus.

Brethren, that misses the point. The gospel isn't merely a message, it's a person. The gospel is the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Jesus Christ.

Bringing the gospel to others is bringing the living presence of Jesus Christ in us. Christ who dwells in us to others. It is where I go, the presence of Jesus Christ goes.

So, when I'm in the supermarket checkout line, the gospel, the presence of Jesus Christ in me, is there. Same when we're with our family, our friends, our co-workers, and the next person we encounter.

[7 : 10] As 1 Peter 2, verses 11 and 12 exhorts, In summary, live the faith always, speak the faith when given opportunity.

This doesn't take any special gift, but it does take a full, personal surrender to Jesus Christ and a willingness to be his witness.

It takes an ever-growing commitment to daily prayer, consistent study of the scriptures, and at least weekly reception of the Eucharist, for which we receive immeasurable grace.

It takes changing our affections, our words, our deeds, our very lives. But we can do this.

God gives us the grace. It's a matter of our willingness to act upon it. There's an unfortunate tendency in Eastertide to relax ourselves spiritually.

[8 : 39] With the intensity of Lent, with its disciplines past, we often kick back and put our lives on sort of a spiritual cruise control all the way to Advent, and then we pay attention again to what God is doing, because we get kind of scared of judgment, those type of things.

The lessons of these first three weeks after Easter say, no way. They say, by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, who dwells in us, overcome the world, Easter 1, endure grief and suffer wrong for the gospel, Easter 2, and abstain from fleshly lusts, Easter 3.

Jesus says to us, his disciples, do not kick back. No cruising allowed. Not, that is, if we want to be found faithful.

This, brethren, is the spirituality taught in the Book of Common Prayer. It will be wise and utilize it intentionally and attentively.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.