

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

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Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0 : 00] St. Gregory of Nyssa was a prominent theologian and a bishop who lived in the mid-4th century.

He served in Cappadocia, that is modern-day Turkey. His theological writings were expansive as he wrote works on the Holy Trinity, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as well as works on salvation and man, anthropology.

As great as he was as a theologian, St. Gregory emphasized the real purpose for the study of Scripture and theology, which was a life of pursuing holiness.

By following Christ. He wrote in his commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes, called The Canticles, that the aim of the life of virtue for the Christian is to become like God.

The aim of the life of virtue for the Christian is to become like God. The Christian world has witnessed its share of scandals over the past several years, finding out that a particular pastor or theologian has been living a double life.

[1 : 20] Meaning preaching and teaching one thing while living quite another. I'm not going to get into the gossip, the specifics of these men or their hypocrisy.

I only say this as a segue to what we heard here from our gospel reading in Matthew chapter 7, which is a warning to all of us.

In other words, false prophets can be thoroughly orthodox in their teaching.

They can be on the right side when it comes to defending the Christian faith. But the question is not about how much they know or how well they can articulate the faith.

The real question is simply, are they striving to live a life of virtue where the goal is to become like God? To once again quote St. Gregory.

[2 : 31] There's a danger for all of us to simply go through the motions, to speak the lingo of the Christian faith.

But we need to ask ourselves, are we striving to live lives of holiness? And for the clergy, are we striving to practice what we preach?

Do we really care about others? Do we pray? All of us need to ask, do we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the scriptures to use the language of that famous collect in Advent?

Do all of us seek to live out our Christian faith? Not for the praise of others, not to put on a show before others, but in private.

For the sake of becoming more like Christ. Our Lord says that a good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit.

[3 : 36] Therefore, the real test is simply, are we being true to the vows that we took in holy baptism? Are we growing? Do our works match our words?

In the baptismal rite of the prayer book, we hear the following questions and answers. Question. Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and the glory of the world with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that thou will not follow them, nor be led by them?

And we answer. I renounce them all, and by God's help, will endeavor not to follow, nor be led by them. Then the follow-up question.

Will thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life? And we answer.

I will by God's help. Those questions and answers from the catechism should be words we return to time and time again, because what Satan desires is to make us deceive ourselves by lulling us into a state of complacency, while rationalizing our own sin.

[5 : 01] Our Lord concludes these tough words here in Matthew chapter 7 by saying, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Notice that our entrance into the kingdom of heaven is not about how well we can articulate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity Christ or salvation. No, it's about doing the will of our Father in heaven. We are called to be practitioners in holiness, not spectators in theology. Now, at this point, I remember hearing sermons from such hard sayings of Jesus that would make me wonder, am I really a Christian?

And that's not the point of our Lord's teaching this morning. Our Lord is calling us into a life of order that gives true joy rather than a disordered life that slides us into deeper hypocrisy and shame. So here's how we know we are being faithful to God, producing fruits of righteousness rather than living in hypocrisy and wickedness.

[6 : 20] First of all, we are to be perpetually confessing our sins to God, coming clean before God, not seeking to rationalize or ignore our own sin.

We need to live honest and transparent lives before our God, confessing our faults to him. Second, we are to make it the number one, yes, the number one priority of our lives to live a life of perpetual repentance.

Repentance is not only acknowledging our sin, it is seeking to turn away from it. This means we need accountability. We need help. And that can take place by way of another Christian or a priest, so that we are striving to be consistent and practicing what we profess as Christians.

Oftentimes, we compare ourselves to others, and we're not looking at ourselves, confessing and repenting, turning away from our sins.

The third thing is we need to live humble lives, always asking the Lord to help us see our sin. And we are called to serve others as we seek to imitate the love of God found in the cross of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 47] Along these same lines, we need to be faithful, caring less about our own image or what others think of us. We need to care more about drawing closer to our God.

Friends, the good news I want you to hear this morning as we consider our Lord's clear warning from Matthew chapter 7 is that you have a shepherd who leads you to become more like him. He has not left you alone. He is calling you to a way of life. You have a God who has come into this world to live the life that we are now called to follow as baptized children.

Our Lord is not trying to scare you into obedience. That's not the point of the text this morning. He's calling us into a life of faithfulness and fidelity so that you can truly be human, meaning that you have a peace that the world cannot give.

He is calling us to avoid the messages and the messengers that would plunge us into unbelief. What the good shepherd Jesus desires for each of you is that you follow him, that you become more like God, living out the life that you were called to in holy baptism as children who desire to do the will of your Father in heaven because, because the aim of the life of virtue for the Christian is to become like God.

[9 : 34] Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.