

THE DAILY OFFICE

| | Morning Prayer | Evening Prayer |
|--|--|--|
| LENT 4 – Mothering Sunday¹ March 11 | Psalms 86, 87 | Psalms 75, 76 Genesis 45:16-45:7 St Luke 23:1-25 |
| St Gregory, ² Monday, March 12 | Psalms 63, 67 Exodus 24 St John 7:1-24 | Psalms 62, 64 Exodus 25:1-22 1 Timothy 1:1-17 |
| Tues., March 13 | Psalms 68, Part 1 Exod. 28:1-4, 29-41 St John 7:25-end | Psalms 68, Part 2 Exodus 29:38-30:16 1 Tim. 1:18-2 end |
| Wed., March 14 | Psalms 71 Exodus 32 St John 8:1-30 | Psalms 72 Exodus 33 1 Timothy 3 |
| Thursday, March 15 | Psalms 75, 76 Exodus 34 St John 8:31-end | Psalms 77 Exodus 35:20-36:7 1 Timothy 4 |
| Friday, March 16 | Psalms 79, 80 Exodus 40:17-end St John 9 | Psalms 81 Leviticus 6:8-end 1 Timothy 5 |
| St Patrick, ³ Saturday, March 17 | Psalms 86, 87 Lev. 19:1-18, 30-end St John 10:1-21 | Psalms 88 Leviticus 25:1-24 1 Timothy 6 |

Reading the Bible. The Prayer Book helps us hear the Bible in two different ways. At Morning and Evening Prayer, we read the Bible *serially*, in large parts, more-or-less chapter by chapter. This kind of reading helps us answer questions like, ‘What happened? What does the text say?’ At Holy Communion the Bible is read *doctrinally* and *ascetically*, to answer questions like, ‘What are we to believe? What can we hope for? Given this faith and this hope, how are we to live?’

Dorothy L. Sayers on the Seven Deadly Sins #7: ‘Pride’

But the head and origin of all sin is the basic sin of *Superbia* or *Pride*. In one way there is so much to say about Pride that one might speak of it for a week and not have done. Yet in another way, all there is to be said about it can be said in a single sentence. It is the sin of trying to be as God. It is the sin which proclaims that Man can produce out of his own wits, and his own impulses and his own imagination the standards by which he lives: that Man is fitted to be his own judge. It is Pride which turns man’s virtues into deadly sins, by causing each self-sufficient virtue to issue in its own opposite, and as a grotesque and horrible travesty of itself. The name under which Pride walks the world at this moment is the Perfectibility of Man, or the doctrine of Progress; and its speciality is the making of blueprints for Utopia and establishing the Kingdom of Man on earth.

For the devilish strategy of Pride is that it attacks us, not on our weak points, but on our strong. It is preeminently the sin of the noble mind—that *corruptio optimi* which works more evil in the world than all the deliberate vices. Because we do not recognise pride when we see it, we stand aghast to see the havoc wrought by the triumphs of human idealism. We meant well, we thought we were succeeding—an look what has come of our efforts! There is a proverb which says that the way to hell is paved with good intentions. We usually take it as referring to intentions that have been weakly abandoned; but it has a deeper and much subtler meaning. That road is paved with good intentions strongly and obstinately pursued, until they become self-sufficing ends in themselves and deified.

*Sin grows with doing good. . .
Servant of God has chance of greater sin
And sorrow; than the man who serves a king.
For those who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve them,
Still doing right.*

¹ The Collect, Epistle and Gospel (‘C, E & G’) are found beginning on page 147.

² Doctor (= ‘Teacher’), Bishop of Rome. AD 604. C, E & G, page 317.

³ Missionary and Bishop. AD 461. C, E & G, page 314.

RECTOR'S CORNER

The Greeks feared above all things the state of mind they called *hubris*—the inflated spirits that come with over-much success. Overweening in men called forth, they thought, the envy of the gods. Their theology may seem to us a little unworthy, but with the phenomenon itself and its effects they were only too well acquainted. Christianity, with a more rational theology, traces *hubris* back to the root-sin of Pride, which places man instead of God at the centre of gravity and so throws the whole structure of things into the ruin called Judgment. Whenever we say, whether in the personal, political or social sphere,

*I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul*

we are committing the sin of Pride; and the higher the goal at which we aim; the more far-reaching will be the subsequent disaster. That is why we ought to distrust all those high ambitions and lofty ideals which make the well-being of humanity their ultimate end. Man cannot make himself happy by serving himself—not even when he calls self-service the service of the community; for “the community” in that context is only an extension of his own ego. Human happiness is a by-product, thrown off in man’s service of God. And incidentally, let us be very careful how we preach that “Christianity is necessary for the building of a free and prosperous post-war world.” The proposition is strictly true, but to put it that way may be misleading, for it sounds as though we proposed to make God an instrument in the service of man. But God is nobody’s instrument. If we say that the denial of God was the cause of our present disasters, well and good; it is of the essence of Pride to suppose that we can do without God.

But it will not do to let the same sin creep back in a subtler and more virtuous-seeming form by suggesting that the service of God is necessary as a means to the service of man. That is a blasphemous hypocrisy, which would end by degrading God to the status of a heathen fetish, bound to the service of a tribe, and liable to be dumped head-downwards in the water—but if He failed to produce good harvest-weather in return for services rendered.

“*Cursed be he that trusteth in man,*” says Reinhold Niebuhr [*Beyond Tragedy*] “even if he be pious man or, perhaps, particularly if he be pious man.” For the besetting temptation of the pious man is to become the proud man: “He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous.”

Last week I suggested that it might be helpful to approach the list of ‘Seven Deadly Sins’ by remembering that they began in a list of ‘Eight Deadly Thoughts’. The idea of ‘sin’ has been trivialized in so many ways. People often speak, for example, as if ‘sin’ was more-or-less the opposite of enjoyment. We need a little distance from notions of sin that have become hollowed out if we are to recover a really full-blooded notion that points toward the grim reality rather than hiding it.

If anyone is interested in pursuing this, a good little book is Josef Pieper’s *The Concept of Sin*. No doubt there are others.

Positively, it might be helpful to say a word about ‘virtue’. It is not a word we hear often. It means a habit that makes us more human, more attentive to reality, more apt to act in a fully human way in a given situation. Christianity builds on ancient notions of virtue especially by emphasizing that the virtues are what open us to love and to the God who is Love: the Trinity.

Vices are bad habits. That is, they are habits that make us less human, less attentive to reality, less apt to act in a fully human way in a given situation, less open to love and less open to God.

Virtue and vice were often discussed in the ancient world. Over time people came to speak of four of these as ‘cardinal’ virtues. The word ‘cardinal’ means ‘hinge’. So these are four virtues on which it has been believed the living of a fully human life ‘hinges’. The ‘cardinal’ virtues are justice, temperance (= self-control), prudence (= practical wisdom) and fortitude. Over time, Christians came to add to these three ‘theological’ virtues: the three mentioned by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope and charity, or love.

In Christian understanding, the reasons for practicing virtue are changed. No Christian could pretend that we human being might restore to ourselves the humanity we lost by our disobedience by practicing the virtues. That would make Christ and his Cross unnecessary. Still less will the practice of virtue earn us God’s favour. The whole human race already has God’s good will and favour, declared in Jesus. In Christian understanding, the practice of virtue is all about receiving. We begin, continue and end the struggle to regain our lost humanity with God’s favour, declared in Jesus. Nothing we do will make God love us more. Nothing we do makes Him love us less. The question is how we will receive what he offers us in his good will and favour towards us. How will we allow His love to act? How will we make room for it? That is, how will we make room for Him? The practice of virtue is about opening ourselves as individuals and as communities to receive what God freely gives in Christ. Faith in Christ receives a vision of the universe and everything in it as theophany, as manifesting God. Hope receives knowledge of a way to share in the life faith sees. Christian hope reveals life as a pilgrimage to a lasting share in the life of the good God who is manifest in Christ and in Creation. Finally, the life of repentance that we live together in Christ is all about entering into God’s own life in faith and hope. That life is Love, the Love that is God even apart from Creation, and the Love that in Creation ‘moves the sun and other stars’. (Dante, *Paradise*, Canto xxxiii).

To approach faith hope and charity from a somewhat different angle, the practice of virtue makes room for the life God shares with us in the Sacraments and the Scriptures. The practice of virtue makes more room. God must fill it.

Does it follow that the 'Cardinal' virtues do not have a place in Christian faith and practice? No, not necessarily. But just why and how they do deserves attention.