

SERMON - THE 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT - 21 FEBRUARY 2010
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

O LORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights; Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness

In Lent we are called to reflect on our lives as Christians. We are called in this season to concentrate on the practice of the Christian virtues of abstinence, prayer and almsgiving. We are called to live this season as we should, as we should the balance of the year, not just during Lent.

Saint Benedict wrote in the Rule, and I am going to substitute the word Christian in place of monk, *Although the life of a Christian (monk) ought to have about it at all times the character of a Lenten observance, yet since few have the virtue for that, we therefore urge that during the actual days of Lent the brethren keep their lives most pure and at the same time wash away during these holy days all the negligence's of other times. And this will be worthily done if we restrain ourselves from all vices and give ourselves up to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart and to abstinence.*

We so often forget that to be Christian is to be different, to be a peculiar people. We are told that although we have to live in the world, we should not live as the world does.

Paul wrote to the Romans, Romans 12:2 (KJV) *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

Also, remember the words of Jesus, Luke 16:13 (KJV) *No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

We are admonished to practice abstinence anyway, not just in Lent. (It was interesting

that when I researched “abstinence” in the reference material that I have all of the references had to do with booze.) Boy! You can bet that material was not compiled by an Anglican.

Seriously, what are we talking about when we use the term “abstinence.” What we are talking about is living a simple life, not accumulating for the sake of accumulating. To live as a Christian is to live simply. Jesus told us to not be anxious.

He told us, Matthew 6:25 (KJV) *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

And, again, Matthew 6:33 (KJV) *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

But how does this tie in to the other Lenten admonitions of prayer and almsgiving.

Let’s talk about prayer. Prayer is our connection to God. Prayer is the only act we can do as Christians where we should not practice abstinence. Prayer is where we live with God, where we live in the presence of God. Prayer is where we live in the presence of God not in the world with it’s “Stuff.” It is living in the presence of God where we learn to let God take control, not the things of the world controlling us.

We can’t take it with us, so why “glom” onto so much of it.

Paul wrote, 1 Tim. 6:7-8 (KJV) *For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. [8] And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

If that is not a call to a simple life, I don’t what would be one.

And that is where almsgiving comes in to play.

Martin Luther wrote, “There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind and the purse.” Richard Foster commented on this, “Of these three, it may well be that we moderns find the conversion of the purse the most difficult.”

We, in today’s world, in the general sense, are obsessed with money.

Christ tells us to be obsessed with the Kingdom of God.

Almsgiving gives us the opportunity to put into practice what we mouth, what we give lip service to, as Christians.

Everything that we have is nothing more than a gift from God. We do not possess a single thing. What we don’t need, we are supposed to give away. It’s God’s anyway.

And when we do give it away, what will happen. Luke 6:38 (KJV) *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

God will provide.

Remember Matthew 6:33 (KJV) *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Think about it.

Amen.