

Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ
Studies on the Daily Lectionary – Lent I: I Corinthians 3-4 (MP2) – Ember Days (MP2)
Class No. 6 – Week of March 10, 2019

The Importance of the Ember Days – and the Critical Role of the Laity¹

“The floor of hell is paved with the skulls of priests.” This old phrase has been variously attributed to St John Chrysostom, Dante and even the 19th century Prime Minister of England, William Gladstone. Whoever first *motted* this *bon*, it’s been around for centuries and exists in more than a dozen languages. It delights us as a good, if grisly, joke: the sanctimonious “holy joes” get their comeuppance in the end.

More certainly, we can say that St John Chrysostom, in his commentary on the *Acts of the Apostles*, did write this: “The soul of a bishop is like a vessel in a storm: lashed from every side, by friends, by foes, by one’s own people, by strangers...not many bishops will be saved.” Chrysostom’s doesn’t have the catchy spice of the first quote, but it’s grimly sober, alarmingly truthful and without witty delight. Chrysostom wrote it, not as a joke but a lament. He was pondering a truth which saddened him. He wasn’t writing to condemn bishops or priests or deacons, but to point out the danger inherent in their calling – and not just to themselves.

We can look with discomfort at the scandals rocking the Roman Church of late, but if we’re honest, our discomfort is not a mere creepiness at “them.” Any consideration of the ancient and universal history of the clergy will tell us, beloved, “them’s us.” St Paul’s letters are littered with references to misbehaving clergymen. Church history is chock-full of priests failing to do what they ought to or doing what they ought not to. For all the holy bishops and priests and deacons on the Church’s Calendar of Saints, there are many, many, many, many, many who’ve failed to live up to their calling (I speak regretfully but accurately and with no cloying humility as one of those).

We all fail to follow Christ as we ought. Bishops, priests and deacons, yes. And members of the Vestry and Sunday School kids and little old ladies and freshly-scrubbed acolytes: all of us, “as many as have been baptized into Christ” have failed Him. It may very well be that whoever first minted the opening quote above is right, but if it’s true, there are plenty of non-clerical Christian skulls paving the hellish linoleum, too.

Four times a year, on the Ember Days, the Church calls us to pray for bishops, priests and deacons, and those who aspire to be such. The Collect asks God to “put it into the hearts of many to offer themselves for this ministry.” This [first week of Lent] is one of those four times. Sadly, the Ember Weeks nowadays are largely ignored or forgotten, the dried-up relic of an overly-clericalized past. How’s that working out for us?

It’s part of the mystery of how God works that He strips our illusions from us, but gradually. Those young, love-intoxicated couples who run headlong into marriage (and thus ensure the continuity of the human race) might hasten more slowly if they realized that “till death us do part” really means sharing your life with somebody who thinks you need your character flaws autopsied every now and then. Similarly, a starry-eyed seminarian, who imagines he’ll be spending his days as a clergyman reading the Daily Office in an ivy-covered gothic garden, might put the skids to those idylls if he knows his future will more often be spent in emergency rooms and skid rows.

But God is all-good and all-knowing and He allows us to see the truth, as St Teresa says, only as much as we can bear it. It’s not necessary for us to know everything, or be everything, or do everything. We each have to wrangle with who God has made us to be.

The clergy aren’t perfect. Some few will come closer to Jesus than the rest of us, but that doesn’t absolve us from the struggle.

The mystery of the Church on earth is this: God has chosen us, bishops, priests, deacons and “as many as have been baptized into Christ” – you included – to be His disciples just exactly where we are and when we are. None of us are gonna make it alone (remember that genuine *bon mot* of St Augustine: *unus christianus nullus christianus* – “one Christian is no Christian”. God is bringing us to His salvation together. That’s what the mystery of the Church *in Heaven* is.

The Ember Days are here: they call you to fast and to pray for the clergy, both the failures and the successes. The call of the clergy is to baptize you, teach you, nourish you on the same Sacraments that nourish them, and to pray constantly for you. *Whatever* is paving the bumpy footpads of hell, *my* job is to make sure *you* aren’t part of the flooring, and *your* job is to pray for *me* through these Ember Days and make sure *my* forehead doesn’t end up there either!

¹An essay originally titled “...Who has committed to the hands of men...” by the Rev. Canon Gregory Lee Wilcox, <https://stjosephsanglican.com/weekly-scribblings/f/who-hast-committed-to-the-hands-of-men>

1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. **2** I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. **3** For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? **4** For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? **6** I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. **7** So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. **8** Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. **9** For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. **11** For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; **13** Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. **14** If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. **15** If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. **16** Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? **17** If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

v. 1: *as unto carnal*: as men of the flesh

v. 8: *reward*: wages

v. 9: *husbandry*: field

v. 13 *try every man's work of what sort it is*: test what sort of work each one has done

v. 15 *yet so as by fire*: but only as through fire

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Exegesis: When Paul established the church at Corinth around 51 A.D., he knew he could not speak to his new converts as fully-mature, battle-tested Christians. Adapting his message to his audience, he fed them with milk, rather than meat (v. 2). Several years later, however, Paul laments that the existence of “strife and divisions” demonstrates that the Corinthians have not grown out of their spiritual infancy (vv. 3-4). Paul’s claim that neither he nor Apollos deserve credit for the church’s “increase” is not false humility. He truly believes that he, Apollos, and any other apostle or preacher are merely vessels through whom God performs mighty works. One worker might plant, another might water, and both will receive a reward (more appropriately translated “wage”) according to their labor. God, though, gives “the increase” and deserves sole credit (vv. 5-9). Thus, there is no basis for the Corinthians to proudly associate with any particular “labourer.”

In verses 10-17, Paul shifts from agricultural imagery to that of constructing a temple (*i.e.*, the Church). Paul is the “wise masterbuilder” (but only by God’s grace) who lays the foundation – Jesus Christ (vv. 10-11). Other workers (teachers and preachers) will contribute labor to the project, using a wide variety of materials – from stubble to precious stone (v. 12). Ultimately, the quality of every such person’s work will be tested “as through fire” (v. 15). Again, Paul declares that each worker will be paid according to the quality of such work (vv. 13-15). Commentators are split on whether verse 17 applies only to apostles and teachers, like Paul, or to all believers. Prudence dictates that the “mere” lay person should take no chances and do nothing to defile the Church and, where appropriate, take affirmative steps to prevent others from committing such defilement.

Exposition: Paul is no longer feeding the Corinthians “milk” in this epistle. Paul/Apollos/Peter divisions are a waste of time. What really matters is each Corinthian’s workmanship in building the temple of God.

Questions for Reflection: What is my sustenance – milk or meat in Christ? Which of the things mentioned in verse 3 have a strong hold on me?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. **19** For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. **20** And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. **21** Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; **22** Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; **23** And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. **4** For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. **5** Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

v. 19: *taketh*: catches

v. 1: *Let a man so account of us*: This is how one should regard us

v. 4: *For I know nothing by myself*: I am not aware of anything against myself; *justified*: acquitted

v. 5: *have praise of God*: receive his commendation from God.

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Exegesis: It is possible that in verses 18-23 Paul is refuting an anonymous rabble-rouser at Corinth who claims to have superior knowledge or wisdom. Paul wrote frequently about the foolishness (*i.e.*, inadequacy) of worldly wisdom in relation to understanding God and his ways. Anyone who attaches himself to Paul or Apollos is, by definition, foolish. Paul cites Job 5:3 and Psalm 94:11 to demonstrate that this is not just his opinion: “I have seen the fool taking root, but suddenly I cursed his dwelling”; “The Lord, knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath” (RSV). By limiting themselves to various “camps” the Corinthians were depriving themselves of the fulness of Christ in whom “all things are yours” (vv. 22-23).

In 4:1-5, Paul turns his focus back on the preachers at Corinth (and elsewhere) as “stewards of the mysteries of God” – a huge responsibility that culminates in judgment by God (4:4). Consequently, Paul cares little for what the Corinthians think of him (4:3), even though he is not aware of any way in which he has failed his stewardship. Even so, neither his own self-judgment nor the judgment of the Corinthians matters. Only God – who can see “the hidden things of darkness’ and “the counsels of the heart” – can judge truly, righteously and justly.

Exposition: Paul warns us in 4:5 that we will be judged not just by what we have done or said but also by the “counsels” of our hearts. In the General Confession during Mass, we confess that we have sinned “in *thought*, word and deed” against God’s “Divine Majesty” (BCP, p. 75) It somehow seems easier to conceive of God taking note of our sins in “word” and “deed” than those sins committed in the inner recesses of our hearts and minds. Sometimes, those mental sins seem to pop up almost uncontrollably and with aggravating frequency. All the more reason, then, to take Paul’s advice, *literally*, to heart: “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8 RSV) The more we think about these things, the more we will have the mind of Christ, the less room there will be for sin, and the less reason we will have to worry about the day when God brings to light “the hidden things.”

Questions for Reflection: Do I worry more about the man's judgment or God's (v. 4:3)? Am I ready for the day described in verse 4:5?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

1 And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. **2** And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. **3** And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. **4** And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? **5** For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? **6** But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. **7** And he arose, and departed to his house. **8** But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. **11** And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? **12** But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. **13** But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

v. 9: *the receipt of custom*: the tax office

v. 10: *publicans*: tax collectors

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Exegesis: Today’s lesson illustrates the value of referring to parallel Gospel accounts in order to obtain a more complete picture or understanding of a particular passage. (See, e.g., Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26) In Mark’s account, we learn that it was four friends who brought the paralytic to Jesus and that they had to make a hole in the roof so they could lower their friend to Jesus. In Luke, we learn the roof was made – at least in part – of tile, an apparently irrelevant but interesting detail that lends authenticity to the story. Both Mark and Luke mention that the friends had previously tried to make their way through the crowd before they found it necessary to ascend to the roof. So, by referring to the parallel passages, we learn of the friends’ persistence in trying to get near Jesus by whatever means possible. These details, lacking in Matthew’s account, help explain why Jesus was so impressed by the faith of the paralytic’s friends. In Luke’s account, we learn that Jesus also instructed the newly healed paralytic to carry his own stretcher home, which he did! (Luke 5:25)

The parallel accounts of the call of Matthew – the tax collector – are largely consistent, although we learn in Mark that Matthew worked by the Sea of Galilee (perhaps he was involved with taxation of the shipping or fishing trade), and in Luke we learn that Matthew “left everything behind.” It seems that Matthew’s response to Jesus’ call was immediate and irrevocable. (Mark 2:13-14; Luke 5:27-28) Whether he was an honest man or not, Matthew would have been widely despised by the locals because he would have been regarded as a collaborator with the occupying Roman forces.

In Luke’s parallel account of 9:10-13, we learn that Jesus was actually at a reception organized for him by his new disciple, Matthew, which explains the presence of other tax collectors. (See Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32) It is not clear whether the reception was at Jesus’ or Matthew’s house. (Mark 2:15) Jesus’ quotation of scripture in verse 13 is from Hosea 6:6.

Exposition: It is appropriate that in this first Ember Day lesson, we see Jesus modeling – to perfection – the “ministry of reconciliation” mentioned in the Ember Day Collect below: preaching to the multitude; recognizing faith; pronouncing forgiveness of sins; healing the sick; calling disciples; and rebuking hypocrites both with his wisdom and his knowledge of scripture. All of this he did “in his own city” (v. 1).

Question for Reflection: Jesus ate with publicans and sinners in order to call them to repentance. Do I do the same, or do I merely eat with sinners for the fun of it, or in friendship’s name?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

Ember Day Collect: O Almighty God, who has committed to the hands of men the ministry of reconciliation¹; We humbly beseech thee, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, to put it into the hearts of many to offer themselves for this ministry; that thereby mankind may be drawn to thy blessed kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, p. 260)

¹II Corinthians 5:18

A Prayer for the Clergy and People: Almighty and everlasting God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; Send down upon our Bishops and other Clergy, and upon the Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and, that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP, pp. 18, 32)

6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. **7** For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

8 Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. **9** For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. **10** We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. **11** Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; **12** And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: **13** Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. **15** For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. **16** Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. **17** For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. **18** Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. **19** But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. **20** For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. **21** What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

v. 6: *I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes*: I have applied to myself and Apollos for your benefit

v. 6: *not to think of men above that which is written*: not to go beyond what is written

v. 7: *For who maketh thee to differ from another?*: For who sees anything different in you?

v. 7: *why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*: why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

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Exegesis: Verses 6 and 7 are the conclusion of the line of thought contained in Tuesday's lesson. Paul and Apollos have not gone beyond "that which is written" (*i.e.*, scripture). Theologically, they are on the same page despite apparent differences in style or emphasis in their preaching. Again, there is no reason for the Corinthians to be "puffed up" (*i.e.*, to boast) about Paul, Apollos or any other preacher. Whatever good the believers have received, they received it from God.

In verses 8 through 13, Paul turns to a vivid and somewhat sardonic comparison of the relative ease enjoyed by the Corinthians with the extreme hardships and humiliations suffered by the apostles, all of which Paul views as ordained by God (v. 9). While it might be tempting for the Corinthians to be "puffed up" about association with Paul, Apollos or others, Paul leaves no doubt about just what a price they have paid on behalf of the Corinthians.

The reference to "angels" in verse 9 reflects New Testament teaching that angels are both spectators and participants in human events. More than just our guardian angels are watching us!

Paul concludes his lengthy discussion of the divisions in the Corinthian church with a friendly warning (as to "my beloved sons") – but still a warning: he hopes to return to Corinth soon, at which time he will be able to see for himself whether the words of those who are "puffed up" are backed up with power (vv 14-21). Meanwhile, his trusted spiritual son, Timothy, will arrive shortly to provide the Corinthians with a refresher course in Christianity 101 (v. 17). Paul leaves the choice to the Corinthians: shape up or prepare for the consequences of his "rod" (v. 21).

Exposition: Every deprivation Paul lists in verses 9-13 would have been a scandal to a self-respecting Greek. Even manual labor was considered demeaning – better left to the slaves. All the more shocking, then, is his plea: "I beseech you, be ye followers of me." The raw power of Paul's Gospel is vividly illustrated by the fact that he actually persuaded more than just a few of these proud Greeks to follow him into a life of obedience to Christ and probable suffering.

Question for Reflection: Paul says that the apostles are fools for Christ's sake (v. 10). Whose fool am I? How many instructors in Christ are around me, and how many fathers (v. 15)?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. **25** It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?

26 Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. **27** What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. **28** And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. **29** Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. **30** But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. **32** Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. **33** But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven....

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. **38** And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. **39** He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. **41** He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. **42** And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

v. 25: *how much more shall they call them of his household*: how much more will they malign those of his household

v. 29: *farthing*: penny

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Exegesis: Having modeled the “ministry of reconciliation” perfectly himself (see Wednesday’s lesson), Jesus called the Twelve Disciples and gave them a lengthy “Commission” before sending them out to preach on their own. Today’s lesson is an excerpt from that larger Commission, and it is helpful to read all of Matthew 10 to put the lesson into context. Jesus sent the Twelve on their mission without money, food, shoes, extra clothing or even a walking stick. They were stepping out entirely on faith “as sheep among wolves” (10:16). If necessary, they were even being asked to leave their families for Jesus’ sake (v. 37). The Disciples had no idea that Jesus would ultimately hang on a cross, but here he warns them that they must be prepared for that shameful fate themselves. Yet, off they went! Unfortunately, we have no information on how the Disciples’ first missionary journey went. Chapter 11 of Matthew describes various activities of Jesus, and the Disciples’ next appearance – in Matthew 12 – is in a field, where they are picking corn on the Sabbath, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees.

Exposition: Despite the lack of any detail about the success of the Disciples’ mission, we do know they all came back safely and that they almost certainly would have fulfilled Jesus’ Commission to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons” (10:8). Jesus had successfully initiated the transfer of his own “ministry of reconciliation” to his Disciples – a transfer later consummated with the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22, Acts 2:1-47). As Anglicans and Catholics, we believe this “ministry of reconciliation” has been passed on throughout the centuries from Jesus to the Disciples (later Apostles) to an unbroken succession of Bishops and those whom they have ordained.

Questions for Reflection: Do I preach on rooftops, or am I a mere "mumbler" that no one hears (v. 27)? How am I doing, in reference to verses 33-39?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

For the Bishop of the Diocese: O God, the Pastor and Ruler of all thy faithful people: look down in mercy upon thy servant David our Bishop, to whom thou hast given charge over this Anglican Diocese of Arizona; and evermore guide, defend, sanctify and save him; and grant him by thy grace so to advance in word and good example, that he, with the flock committed to him, may attain to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (*A Manual for Priests*, p. 264 (Preservation Press 5th ed. 1996))

For the Increase of the Ministry: O Lord Jesus Christ, whose servants Simon Peter and Andrew his brother did at thy word straightway leave their nets to become fishers of men: Give thy grace, we humbly beseech thee, to those whom thou dost call to the sacred ministry of thy Church, that they may hear thy voice, and with glad hearts obey thy word; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, word without end. *Amen.* (*A Manual for Priests*, p. 265 (Preservation Press 5th ed. 1996))

1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. **2** And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. **3** Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. **4** No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. **5** And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. **6** The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. **7** Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: **9** Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. **10** Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. **11** It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: **12** If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: **13** If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. **15** Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

v. 5: An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. (RSV)

v. 8: *according to my gospel*: as preached in my gospel

v. 14: *but to the subverting of the hearers*: but only ruining the hearers

v. 15 *Study*: Do your best; *dividing*: handling

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Exegesis: Nearing the end of his own life, Paul conveys practical, pastoral advice to his “beloved son,” Timothy (1:2), who – perhaps because of his youth – might have needed some shoring up in his apostolic role. (*See*, 1:8-2:13) Paul had done all he could. He has passed on the “ministry of reconciliation” to the next generation. According to tradition, Timothy was the first bishop of Ephesus, and he, too, was martyred c.97 A.D. under Emperor Nerva.

Exposition: Paul’s letter to Timothy ends on a poignant note: “For I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” (II Timothy 4:6-8) The mixture of joy and sadness in this valedictory passage as Paul approaches his martyrdom is almost palpable. He has passed the torch to Timothy, who, in turn, will pass the torch before his own death. And so, through the centuries. We know this “ministry of reconciliation” will continue until our Lord returns, for as Jesus said to the Eleven following his resurrection: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matthew 28: 18-20)

Questions for Reflection: Am I a good soldier of Jesus Christ (v. 3)? What “hardness” have I endured? What must I do in order to become a better one? Do I believe verses 11-13? Am I living my life as if I believe them? What do I need to do, in order to more fully respond to God’s call? How do I accomplish verse 15? What do I need to stop doing? What do I need to start doing?

Spiritual Resolve: _____

Ember Day Collect: O Almighty God, who has committed to the hands of men the ministry of reconciliation; We humbly beseech thee, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, to put it into the hearts of many to offer themselves for this ministry; that thereby mankind may be drawn to thy blessed kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, p. 260)

For Those Who are to be Admitted in Holy Orders: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who hast purchased to thyself an universal Church by the precious blood of thy dear Son; Mercifully look upon the same, and at this time so guide and govern the minds of thy servants the Bishops and Pastors of thy flock, that they may lay hands suddenly on no man, but faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons, to serve in the sacred Ministry of thy Church. And to those who shall be ordained to any holy function, give thy grace and heavenly benediction; that both by their life and doctrine they may show forth thy glory, and set forward the salvation of all men; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* [*To be used in the Weeks preceding the stated Times of Ordination.*] (BCP, p. 38)

Appendix

Suggestion: at least once this week, read and reflect upon the appointed Ember Day scriptures (BCP, pp. 260-61):

For the Epistle: Acts 13:44-49. The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’” And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. (RSV) (Per Massey Shepherd: This passage was “selected because of its missionary theme.”)

The Gospel: St. Luke 4:16-21. 16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; 17 and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” 20 And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (RSV) (Per Massey Shepherd: “This selection is...designed to set forth our Lord’s own accepted role of ministry as the pattern and example of those who are ordained to carry on His mission.”)

History of the Ember Days

“The origin of the Ember Days is obscure and much debated. About one thing only is there no dispute: namely, that they are of purely Roman origin and that their observance was extended only where the Roman rite was spread and adopted. An early tradition, which may be right, ascribed their institution to Pope Callistus I (c.218-25) as Christian counterparts to pagan rites of purification at the times of sowing seed (December), harvest (June), and vintage (September). Biblical support for the custom was found in Zech. 8:19, according to a ‘western’ reading of this text that prescribed three fasts, not four. The earliest certain reference to the Ember seasons, however, is found in the sermons of Pope Leo the Great (440-61), who speaks of four times of fasting; yet it is uncertain if the ‘Lenten’ Ember Days were known in his time – the fourth season may very well have been Lent itself. The Gelasian Sacramentary, for example, which is later than Pope Leo, knows only the June, September, and December Ember seasons, not the one in March.

The association of the Ember Days with Ordination to the sacred Ministry was a secondary development. The propers for these days in the Roman Missal develop the seasonal theme; only those of the Saturday in the Lenten Ember Days deal with the priestly vocation. We know that Pope Gelasius I (492-6) prescribed the conferring of Holy Orders at the vigil service on Saturday of the first week on Lent; and it may be that this pontiff was responsible not only for the introduction of the Lenten Embertide but also for the first association of these seasons with Ordination. However, there seems to be good evidence for an older tradition at Rome of conferring Orders at the vigil on the third Saturday in December.

Pope Gregory the Great (590—604) is supposed to have fixed the exact times of the Ember seasons: the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent, the Feast of Pentecost, September 14th (Holy Cross Day), and December 13th. Yet the more ancient assignment of the seasons according to months, rather than fixed day, lingered on in many Western churches, even after the adoption of the Roman service books. Only in the eleventh century, largely through the efforts of Pope Gregory VII (1073-85), did uniformity of observance prevail.

The name ‘Ember’ is a corruption of the German word ‘Quatember,’ which in turn derives from the Latin *Quattuor Tempora*, or ‘the Four Seasons.’ The choice of Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday goes back to the origin of these observances. By the middle of the second century the first two days were already established as days of fasting, and at Rome Saturday was also a fast day – the ‘vigil’ of Sunday. In the older Roman Sacramentaries the Sundays following the four Ember seasons were ‘vacant’: they had no Eucharistic propers assigned to them because of the long service of Vigil, Ordination, and Mass that took up most of Saturday evening.”

(All quotations are from Shepherd, *The Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, pp. 260-61 (NY: Oxford University Press 1950)).