



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title:
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Jeremiah 17:5-10
Second Reading 1 Corinthians 15:12-20
Gospel Luke 6:17-26

The Didache – or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles is a small manual for catechumens – those preparing for baptism in the early Church – some date it back as far as the first century. It opens with the following stark statement: “There are two Ways, one of Life and one of Death, and there is a great difference between the two Ways.”

This statement came to mind as I was preparing this sermon, because the theme of “right way” versus “wrong way” is prominent in today’s readings, and because this morning we will be celebrating a Baptism at which a new Christian will begin his journey on that Way of Life. We, the gathered community who witness the vows made in his name, will be asked to do all in our power to support him in this journey, and renew our own baptismal covenant, that is, to reaffirm *that* journey as our journey, *that* Way, as our Way.

The journey begins with an act of trust. Jeremiah, in this morning's first reading spells it out for us. "Cursed are those," he says, "who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength...Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD." Putting our whole trust then in His grace and love, we set out on Way of Life.

The imagery found in both Old Testament readings appointed for today is illuminating. Jeremiah's "tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream" and the psalmist's "trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season conjure up images of careful gardening and tending, of greenness, fruitfulness, increasing freedom from anxiety, and a special sort of resilience, an ability to resist the heat and drought when they appear. The Way of Life is portrayed here as an inner and gradual process of growth that relies on "underground" sources, so to speak, sources not immediately visible to the naked eye – on God, in other words, who is, as today's collect puts it, the strength of all who put their trust in him.

In today's Gospel we get a sense of what we are journeying towards and what we are journeying away from. The passage from Luke we just heard makes it very clear that our journey can make little sense to the world, which means that it will not be an easy one, we will need all the help we can get. If we were to ask around regarding what most people in our culture (and, no doubt in Jesus' culture as well) aspired to in this life life, the answer they would give

would add up to something like, “I want to be rich, fat, happy. Oh, and popular, too”. Well, in our day, perhaps ‘fat’ would not be the word – but replace it with ‘fit’ (which all too often reflects the same kind of pandering to the desires of the flesh that ‘fat’ does), and you pretty much sum up the aspirations of contemporary man. And they are aspirations that are foisted on us all daily and insistently. They scream at us from billboards, television and movie screens, radios, newspapers, magazines, in homes and offices, and in the classroom. There is no way to avoid being affected by this constant barrage, we are all touched by it. And yet, our Lord tells us that this is the Way of Death. It is a life lived, not as Jeremiah’s flourishing tree, but as a “shrub in the desert that shall not see when relief comes.” It is a life lived as if Christ had not been raised from the dead, as if there were no resurrection of the dead, and so, a life that leads to death. But we proclaim Christ as risen, and it is faith in His resurrection and ours that allows us to reject it.

The Way of Life, then, is a hard one to follow, because it flies in the face of what the world around us is constantly telling us.

And that brings us back to what we are about to do today. [In a few moments] we will be welcoming a new companion on the Way – or, in Jeremiah’s image, planting a new sapling by the stream, and at the same time we will be renewing our own baptismal covenant. We will be asked once more if we will “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?” In other words, will we continue to be Church.

And this is vitally important. Because our progress along the Way of Life depends on that one intention as much as if not more than anything else. It is only as community that we can withstand the pressures from the world out there to conform to the Way of Death. It is only by continuing in the faith of the apostles, in sharing Eucharist and in praying for each other and for the world that we can be a community that does resist. It is, in the end, our community, the Church, which makes a way in this world for the Spirit, the stream from which each of us can draw the strength and sustenance we need along to continue our journey.

So, let us take the opportunity today's baptism offers us to recommit ourselves to the task of being a community. ** Let us listen carefully to each promise we make, and answer prayerfully, "I will, with God's help". Finally, let us determine to spend some time in the days ahead reflecting on what it is we have done today – perhaps reading through on our own the vows and the covenant we have reaffirmed at this Baptism, and ponder what they mean in the context of our daily living.

And let us all take this opportunity to recommit ourselves to the upbuilding of this particular community, that it may provide all of us the support we need as we travel together along the Way of life.