

Celebrate

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

February 16, 2020

In today's reading from Deuteronomy we are called to choose life by loving and obeying God. Much of today's gospel reading echoes portions of the Ten Commandments. Jesus' instructions to the crowd reveal a pattern of behavior that honors both God and the neighbor, resulting in life and health for the whole community. We too are invited to embrace these commandments, not out of fear of retribution, but because God has promised that to do so means life for us.

Prayer of the Day

O God, the strength of all who hope in you, because we are weak mortals we accomplish nothing good without you. Help us to see and understand the things we ought to do, and give us grace and power to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading

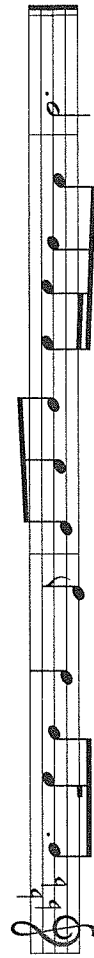
The LORD sets before the people of God a clear choice. Life and prosperity will come to the faithful; loss of the land will be the consequence of disobedience. Choosing life entails loving and holding fast to the LORD. Life in God's presence presupposes the promise made to the ancestors.

[Moses said to the people:] See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them,

¹⁸I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

or Sirach 15:15-20 [not printed]

Wisdom literature has a high estimation of human possibilities. We are God's trusted creatures. Wisdom invites people to choose to keep God's commandments. God does not command people to be wicked or give them permission to sin.



Hap - py are they who fol - low the teach - ing of the LORD.

Happy are they whose way is blameless,
who follow the teaching of the LORD!
²Happy are they who observe your decrees
and seek you with all their hearts,
³who never do any wrong,
but always walk in your ways.
⁴You laid down your commandments,
that we should fully keep them. **R**
⁵Oh, that my ways were made so direct
that I might keep your statutes!
⁶Then I should not be put to shame,
when I regard all your commandments.
⁷I will thank you with a true heart,
when I have learned your righteous judgments.
⁸I will keep your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me. **R**

Second Reading

Human leaders in the church are not the ones who control ministry. Rather they are coworkers who belong to God, the one who truly controls and continuously empowers the ministry of the church.

Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? ⁴For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. ⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

Gospel

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts his followers to embrace standards of righteousness that exceed legal requirements and traditional expectations.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' ²²But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. ²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If

your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. ³¹"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³"Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one."

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Trusting that God hears us, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Shepherding God, you protect and guide us with your word. Lead your church into ever closer relationship with you, that we might better know your commands, hold fast to your decrees, and live in your law. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of the cosmos, heaven and earth bear witness to the splendor of all you have created. Bless the ground, trees, waterways, and skies with abundant life. Restore synergy between humankind and the natural world, that we may live in harmony with the world you have made. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of peace, you show solidarity with all who suffer. Bring an end to violence, war, discrimination, and all other forms of deadly hate, that we may experience your love through the power of justice. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of hope, you provide bountifully for all people. Use our lives to alleviate global injustice and eliminate poverty, that all benefit from the abundant gifts you pour out for your people. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of growth, you nurture this community. Cultivate in us a spirit of service to one another, and bless us in the ministry we share (*ministries of the congregation may be named*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of our ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, we give you thanks for our forebears in the faith who now rest in your eternal grace and love (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Confident that you are able to accomplish more than we even dare to ask, we bring these prayers before you, believing in your saving grace revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday Psalm 119:9-16. **Tuesday** (commemoration of Martin Luther, renewer of the church, died 1546) James 2:1-13. **Wednesday** Proverbs 2:1-15. **Thursday** Psalm 2. **Friday** Hebrews 11:23-28. **Saturday** Mark 9:9-13. **Transfiguration of Our Lord** (commemoration of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, martyr, died 156) Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9.

CELEBRATE February 16, 2020

Volume 51, Number 1

CELEBRATE (ISSN 1083-3242, USPS 763-460) is published quarterly by Augsburg Fortress, 510 Marquette Ave., Suite 800, Minneapolis, MN, 55402. Periodicals postage paid in Twin Cities, MN and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Celebrate, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, P.O. Box 1553, Minneapolis, MN 55440-8730. Printed in U.S.A. Price per weekly part \$4.90 per 100 copies; price in Canada subject to exchange rates. Minimum order 50 copies of each issue; all orders must be in multiples of 50. Copyright © 2019 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. May not be reproduced. Revised Common Lectionary © 1992 Consultation on Common Texts. Readings from New Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Prayers of the day, psalm, and readings during the week from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* © 2006, admin. Augsburg Fortress. Refrain music by Ronald A. Nelson. Refrain accompaniment is in *Psalter for Worship, Year A* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007). Please visit our Web site at augsburgfortress.org. Lectionary year A.