

a sermon from MATTHEW 28:18-20:

A CALL TO THE CHURCH FOR EVANGELISM

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I. A PRAYER

Let us pray: “O Lord GOD, holy Father, be You now and forever blessed. For as You will, so it has been done; and what You do is good. Let Your servant rejoice in You, not in myself or in any other. You alone are my true joy. You are my hope and my crown. You are my gladness and my honor. O Lord, what has Your servant but what has been received from You without deserving it? Yours are the things that You have given and have made.”¹ O CHRIST, let me be thankful! AMEN.

II. A PROPOSITION

Let The Church boldly go forth in the authority and victory of CHRIST her Head - Who gives His Body on earth the strength to go forth, to baptize and to teach all that He commands of men - that they might be rescued from sorrow, healed of pain and blessed with eternal life!

III. A SCRIPTURE - MATTHEW 28:18-20 – GO YE THEREFORE!

18 And JESUS came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in The Name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.²

IV. INTRODUCTION – WHY MUST THE CHURCH EVANGELIZE?

Why must The Church be involved in evangelism? To answer this question, let us define the words “Church” and “evangelism.” We will then be better able to see why the answer to this question is a glorious “YES!” that resounds across the heavens and the earth into the hearts, minds and souls of all who willingly confess that JESUS CHRIST is Lord! We shall then see that evangelism and the evangelized both belong in the hands of The faithful Church. And while it is The HOLY SPIRIT Who converts the souls of sinners, it is we The Church, the congregation of the saints of The Lord, who are commanded by The Almighty to go forth as His witnesses to carry out The Great Commission of MATTHEW 28:19-20.

¹ 1, Catholic Family Prayer Book, A Prayer from “The Imitation of CHRIST,” Thomas a Kempis, p 184.

² 2, KJV, MATTHEW 28:18-20.

V. A MATTER OF DEFINITION - WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Let us address this first question, what is The Church? We may of a certainty say that it is a community of men of faith who confess, believe in and live under JESUS as The CHRIST, The Messiah, as revealed in The Holy Scriptures. Therefore, if there is no faith in CHRIST, there may be before us a religious organization, but not a Church! Of the mystery which is The Church, Saint Clement of Alexandria says, “What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the universe, one Logos of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her ‘Church!’”³

Fausset goes to The New Testament term for Church - “Ekkleesia” – which in The Greek means “House of The Lord.” But The Church is not a “building or house of assembly” made of mere mortar and brick, but of living stones of faith in GOD The Father, Son and Holy Ghost. She is rather The organized Body of those saved in The Lord, the unity of her members set by being “...united to The One Head, CHRIST, and forming one organic living whole...”⁴

And so Saint Paul writes in EPHESIANS 2:19-22 that we as Christians are now “...fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of GOD; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, JESUS CHRIST Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of GOD through The Spirit!”⁵

Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary offers several definitions of “Church,” one of which is “The collective body of Christians, or of those who profess to believe in CHRIST, and acknowledge Him to be the Savior of mankind. In this sense, the Church is sometimes called the Catholic or Universal Church.”⁶ The Anglican 39 Articles of

³ 3, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 813, The Sacred Mystery of The Church’s Unity, p 233.

⁴ 4, Fausset’s Bible Dictionary, entry for “Church,” # 827.01.

⁵ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:19-22.

⁶ 5, Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, p CHU - CHU, entry # 2 under CHURCH, n.

Religion echo this in Article XIX - “Of The Church” – which declares that “The visible Church of CHRIST is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of GOD is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to CHRIST’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same...”⁷

The Catechism of The Catholic Church identifies three states of The Church – on earth, in Purgatory and in Heaven proper: “When The Lord comes in glory, and all his angels with Him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to Him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory [in Heaven proper], contemplating ‘in full light, GOD Himself triune and one, exactly as He is!’”⁸

VI. A DEEPER AND WIDER VIEW OF THE CHURCH FROM WHICH TO EVANGELIZE

So when we speak of The Church, we may refer to both The Church on earth and The Church in Heaven. The Church herself encompasses all those who are redeemed by GOD’s Grace in CHRIST both now in this world and for eternity Above. The Church then spans across time, from the first calling out of the elect by our Lord Himself during His earthly ministry, to our own small sliver of the present in this world and into the future to claim all who will be redeemed by The Body and Blood of The blessed Saviour. And the saints of GOD in Heaven are as much part of The Church as we who are the saints of GOD on earth now.

When we speak of The Church, we may also refer to both the visible and the invisible Church here on earth. For not every man who is to be found within the walls of buildings that employ the name of “Church” on any given Sunday morning are actually saved in CHRIST. Nor does absolutely every man who has been redeemed by The Lamb of GOD have access to being part of a visible Church at every time and in every place across the globe, yet are still part of The invisible Church.

⁷ 6, 39 Articles of Religion, Article XIX. Of The Church.

⁸ 3, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 954, The Communion of The Church of Heaven and Earth, p 270.

Yes, The Church is to be both the worldwide and local assemblies of people who confess CHRIST as their Savior - but there is more! Yes, The Church is to be an institution made up of people seeking to live godly lives - but there is more! Yes, The Church is to be a place where GOD's Holy Scriptures are reverently read and earnestly preached - but there is more! Yes, The Church is to be a house of worship where the holy Sacraments are carried out to its members - but there is more!

These very reasonable definitions of The Church omit the most important nature of The Church on earth, as in Heaven. Indeed, COLOSSIANS 1:18 reveals that The Church is The very Body of CHRIST on earth. We are her members and our Lord JESUS CHRIST is her Head: "And He is The Head of The Body, The Church: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence."⁹ Through her, The Kingdom of GOD comes even now down through the ages! Through her and thus in we her children, CHRIST is present on earth even now, preceding His Second Coming! Indeed, The Church is The Kingdom Come in part even now!

VII. A MATTER OF DEFINITION - WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

We may now address our next question, what is evangelism? Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines the noun "evangelism" as "The promulgation of the Gospel [of CHRIST]."¹⁰ Webster defines the verb "evangelize" as "To instruct in The Gospel; to preach The Gospel to, and convert to a belief of The Gospel; as to evangelize heathen nations; to evangelize the world."¹¹ Wycliffe observes that the goal of evangelization is "enlisting men under The Lordship of CHRIST," which is sealed in The Sacrament of Baptism and marks the full entry of the saints into The Body of CHRIST.¹²

⁹ 2, KJV, COLOSSIANS 1:18.

¹⁰ 5, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary, p EVA - EVA, entry under EVANGELISM, n.

¹¹ 5, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary, p EVA - EVA, entry under EVANGELIZE, v.

¹² 7, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 28:19, p 985.

By the command and power of CHRIST in The Great Commission of MATTHEW 28:18-20, The Church is directed to make disciples of all men; to baptize believers in the Name of The holy Trinity; to teach the converted to observe all that is commanded by CHRIST JESUS. True evangelism occurs when The Church declares the Good News of forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal salvation at The Cross of CHRIST to sinners as The Lord's faithful servant in His power and authority. As Wycliffe says, CHRIST's Commission to His Church to evangelize "...is backed by the authority of Him Who is GOD's mediatorial King, with power extending to every realm" in creation.¹³

The seal of successful Christian evangelism is the baptism of the saved adult, the consecrated infant and the catechized child into The Church. It marks the beginning, not the end, of the life of a saint within The Body of CHRIST. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer declares this in "The Order for The Ministration For Holy Baptism," the authority of which to The Church comes directly from CHRIST Himself in The Great Commission as in MATTHEW 28:18-20. And GOD forbid that His Church should ever shrink in fear from reaching out to the lost, the suffering, the hopeless! For as Wycliffe says, she has the "...blessed promise that CHRIST's Presence, as well as authority, shall empower... [her] to perform this Commission!"¹⁴

So the Minister performing the baptism is directed to say, "...forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin; and that our Saviour CHRIST saith, None can enter into The Kingdom of GOD, except he be regenerate and born anew of Water and of The Holy Ghost; I beseech you to call upon GOD the Father, through our Lord JESUS CHRIST, that of His bounteous mercy He will grant to this... [Child or Person] that which by nature He cannot have; that he may be baptized with Water and The Holy Ghost, and be made a living member of the same."¹⁵

¹³ 7, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 28:18, p 985.

¹⁴ 7, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 28:20, p 985.

¹⁵ 8, Book of Common Prayer, "The Order For The Ministration of Holy Baptism of Infants and Adults," p 457.

VIII. THE CHURCH IS COMMANDED TO EVANGELIZE

Again we return to our text of MATTHEW 28:18-20 and seek more deeply what The Saviour is calling us to do. Why would The Church ever sit quietly and cowering within her walls while men are suffering in sorrow and souls are perishing? For “all power” which The Father has given to The Son is bestowed upon The Son’s Bride The Church! “Go, make disciples of all men!” commands CHRIST. As Walvoord and Zuck observe, we His saints are to be always “going, baptizing and teaching” in His victorious Name!¹⁶

We may well hear our Divine Master issuing us our marching orders: “Go to all nations with The whole Word of GOD! Baptize all believers in The Trinity! Teach all men to obey GOD’s Commands and live daily in CHRIST! Why sit you here awaiting for My Second Coming? I am already with you! Go forth in trust and obedience, for this is the calling I have set before you until I come again!”

And let us carefully note that The Great Commission is given to the collective Body of CHRIST – The Church – and not isolated, lone, cut-off Christians! Only we the saved in CHRIST as the Church on earth are capable of carrying out this great and holy mission, but we must do it under His authority! And men must be drawn into, not a mere intellectual ascent to confessing JESUS as The Messiah, but into a living and life-changing relationship with Him within His Body!

IX. THE EVANGELIZED NEED THE CHURCH

The writer of HEBREWS proclaims that, having been evangelized into The Faith of CHRIST, the Christian finds his greatest blessings and source of strength within the Church. Within The Church, we are sanctified by the sacrifice of CHRIST to approach boldly the very Throne of GOD The Father. Within the Church we have CHRIST Himself interceding for us in heaven as our high priest. Within The Church our hearts are filled with all the assurances of faith. Within The Church our hearts are cleansed from evil. Within The Church we enter into baptismal covenant with The holy Trinity.

¹⁶9, Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament, MATTHEW 28:18-20, p 93-94.

HEBREWS 10 declares that it is within The Church we find encouragement to hold fast to our Faith. Within The Church believers encourage each other to live in love and be joyous in good works. Within The Church we encourage one another to live godly and pious lives. Within The Church we are kept from willful sinful rebellion against The Almighty, lest we commit the unpardonable sin of unforgivable blasphemy. Within The Church we are warned of the torments of hell reserved for unrepentant sinners and those who would deny The Faith. Is it any wonder that The Almighty exhorts His saints to not forsake the congregation of the righteous?

So John Wesley exhorts us to keep close to GOD and His holiness, never turning away from His Church, but always renewing and living our baptismal confession of faith in Him: “Let us draw near - To GOD. With a true heart - In godly sincerity. Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience - So as to condemn us no longer. And our bodies washed with [the] pure water [of baptism]...”¹⁷ GOD forbid that we should be found “...forsaking the assembling ourselves - In public or private worship [of CHRIST]. As the manner of some is - Either through fear of persecution, or from a vain imagination that they were above external ordinances. But exhorting one another - To faith, love, and good works...!”¹⁸

HEBREWS 10:19-25 counsels us, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by The Blood of JESUS... And having an High Priest over the house of GOD; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day [of evil] approaching!”¹⁹

¹⁷ 10, John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes, HEBREWS 10:22.

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/WesleysExplanatoryNotes/wes.cgi?book=heb&chapter=010>

¹⁸ 10, John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes, HEBREWS 10:25.

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/WesleysExplanatoryNotes/wes.cgi?book=heb&chapter=010>

X. THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO EACH MAN AS THE CHURCH NEEDS

For each believer has a function essential to The Church. Our spiritual gifts may only fully profit us and others fully when we function as part of The Body of CHRIST, which is The Church. Walvoord and Zuck note various gifts given to different members of The Body of CHRIST by The HOLY SPIRIT: Biblical wisdom; knowledge of applying Biblical Truth to everyday life; faith even in the face of great troubles; healing of sickness and restoring health; miraculous powers of victory over disabilities, evil spirits and even death; prophecy of Divine messages to GOD's people; ability to distinguish between spirits of true versus false prophets; speaking in unknown tongues; the interpretation of tongues.²⁰

This is made clear in I CORINTHIANS 12:8-12 by Saint Paul: "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as The Body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of That one Body, being many, are one Body: so also is CHRIST."²¹ These gifts are useless when the individual Christian is severed from The Church – both to himself and to his brethren. And The Church suffers the loss of these gifts of The Spirit of GOD when that individual Christian is cut off.

The gifts and abilities that The Creator gives each of His saints are not random or by mere chance. Nor is our becoming part of the faithful local Church a matter of chance or solely by our own will. Rather, we each have our place in The Church, and GOD equips us according to her needs, that we may be part of The local Body according to His design. Saint Paul tells the Corinthians further in I CORINTHIANS 12:27-28, "Now ye

¹⁹ 2, KJV, HEBREWS 10:19-25.

²⁰ 9, Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament, I CORINTHIANS 12:7-10, paragraph 2, p 533.

²¹ 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 12:8-12.

are The Body of CHRIST, and members in particular. And GOD hath set some in The Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”²²

Scripture further reveals that each individual Christian, by being part of The one Body of CHRIST - The Church - are also members of each other. So when one member of the Church is removed from functioning as part of the body of CHRIST, we have catastrophic consequences and the entire Body suffers. Whenever the individual Christian is isolated from filling his Divinely appointed role in The Church, both he and The Body both suffer spiritual want and loss. Indeed, The Church herself is robbed of that individual Christian’s contributions. And all other members of The Church suffer hurt from the absence of the isolated Christian.

So those successfully evangelized and newly converted Christian must become part of The Church on earth in order to survive and flourish, that they may become part of The Church in Heaven. Here Saint Paul says in ROMANS 12:4-5, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one Body in CHRIST, and every one members one of another.”²³ John Gill observes here of Saint Paul’s comparison of the parts of the human body to the place of each Christian within The Body of CHRIST, “...which is but one, and has many members in union with it, and one another; and which are placed in an exact symmetry and proportion, and in proper subserviency to each other, and for the good of the whole.”²⁴

Successful evangelism means the lost sinner accepts JESUS CHRIST as his Savior and becomes part of The Body of CHRIST on earth, that he might take his proper place within The Church as ordained by GOD and for which The Lord equips him according to His Divine will. For within The Church, each believer has been given a place of service in accordance with the gifts bestowed upon him via the HOLY SPIRIT.

²² 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 12:27-28.

²³ 2, KJV, ROMANS 12:4-5

²⁴ 11, John Gill’s Exposition of The Bible, ROMANS 12:4.

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/GillsExpositionoftheBible/gil.cgi?book=ro&chapter=012&verse>

GOD forbid then that the new Christian, nor anyone saved in CHRIST, should be cut off from the house of GOD where The Word and Sacraments are duly administered, where his fellow saints meet to worship and be renewed, where men are properly trained and equipped to face the trials of life and the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil! All Christians belong in GOD's Church active, militant and vibrant!

XI. IN CONCLUSION

It is a Command of GOD that we should worship Him with holiness in the congregation of The Lord, which is The Church. Can The Church do without any of the gifts of The HOLY SPIRIT that each individual Christian brings to her by GOD's design? Where would The Church be if she did not evangelize to the lost to bring them into her arms?

And where would the lost be if, once accepting CHRIST as their Savior, had nowhere to resort to for continuing their journey of Christian faith? Can the individual believer do without the spiritual gifts of The HOLY SPIRIT that others may have, but he lacks? Is it any wonder then that we are commanded in Holy Scripture to worship GOD in the congregation of The Lord JESUS CHRIST, which is The Church? Is it any wonder that we are warned not to forsake the congregation of GOD, which is The Church? Thus, evangelism and the evangelized both belong in the hands of The Church.

Let The Church boldly go forth in the authority and victory of CHRIST her Head - Who gives His Body on earth the strength to go forth, to baptize and to teach all that He commands of men - that they might be rescued from sorrow, healed of pain and blessed with eternal life! And let The Church renew her obedience to and work in our Lord JESUS CHRIST as He commands in The Great Commission as in MATTHEW 28:18-20: "And JESUS came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in The Name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen!"²⁵

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²⁵ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 28:18-20.

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