

The Glory of Worship

Trinity Sunday

(From the Collect & Epistle *Revelation* iv. 1 ff.; v. 6, 11-14 is added)

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked , and, behold , a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said , Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter . 2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold , a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. 3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. 4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting , clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. 5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. 6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying , Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was , and is , and is to come . 9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying , 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created ...

Worship of God surely is the theme and principal activity of today's Psalms, Old Testament Lesson, and Epistle. We will make use of this Trinity Sunday emphasis to focus on this highest of all human acts: the worship of Almighty God.

The other seasons of the church year bring to mind specific events in the earthly life of our Savior Jesus Christ: His Advent; His suffering, passion, and crucifixion; His resurrection; His ascension, and finally, His pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But this Trinity Sunday scene from Revelation is limited to a description of the unrestrained worship of God. One well imagines that this reality is the principal joy of Heaven. It's as if our Sunday service which occupies a mere hour and a half of a week of 168 hours (about .9 of a % of the week) is now expanded to every moment of every succeeding age, forever and ever: *...and they rest not day and night, saying , Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was , and is , and is to come.*

What can we conclude about the worship of God? First of all, it is our highest joy. If ever there was a wall-socket that that the human soul longs to be plugged into in order to function fully, and happily, and at its best, it is that of divine worship. In so doing, we are compelled to look upward, and not downward, to Another infinitely higher than we, and not to ourselves, or to others around us. This word "joy" associated with the act of worship is very important. Joy certainly means laughter, fulfillment, and satisfaction, but it goes far deeper. In three letters this word stands for the happiest and highest resting place available to any human soul. This is a joy

that cannot possibly be removed from us, unless we remove ourselves from it. Holy joy, where it exists truly and really, is the envy of the whole world, for all the world seeks such joy. It is infectious, and if allowed to do so, will spread itself without restraint among human hearts. There is simply no activity available to man that can serve as its substitute, although a whole host of things present themselves to us, to that end, as its competitors. The tabloids tell us that the rich, famous, and beautiful have it. But the facts tell us otherwise. *Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God*, proclaimed David (Ps. 43:4). The throne of God is surrounded by joyous shouts. On earth, we seem to join in with them from a great distance. But it will not always be so.

Secondly, the One we worship deserves this act which will fill our eternal existence: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created ...* God the Father is *worthy*, because He has *created all things...* We might well conclude that He could have chosen to create nothing, since He, in Himself, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, is utterly self-sufficient. Our mere existence, in other words, and that of all other created beings, is simply the product of His love and generosity. There is no inevitability whatsoever to our placement here on earth. This should be a very humbling thought. How could we deserve anything? Did we even deserve to come into being in the first place? Hardly.

When the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is added to this scene in the next chapter of Revelation, the same theme continues. The Son is also *worthy*, because He is the sacrificial Lamb that *had been slain* for the sins of the whole world.

5:6 And I beheld , and, lo , in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain , having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth... 11 And I beheld , and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. 13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying , Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. 14 And the four beasts said , Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Did we deserve to have God, who had already gifted us with existence, come to rescue us from our willful departure from His company and presence, choosing instead to separate ourselves from Him, and placing ourselves at the disposal of the awful Prince of Darkness? Since the answer is so blatantly obvious, and our debt to God so great, there is only one appropriate response, and it is not a casual, half-hearted, and temporary one. It will occupy us forever. We are reminded of that wonderful sentence from the BCP *General Thanksgiving* (p. 19):

“We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Thirdly, the worship of God, even though it supplies us joy and fulfillment and eternal pleasure, is not first and foremost for us. It is for *Him*. Once again, of God the Father it is said: *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created ...* And of the Lamb who came to earth to die for us, we read in Hebrews 12:

2 ...Look[ing] unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We were made for the Father’s pleasure, and redeemed for the Son’s joy. That certainly turns things around, does it not? It is virtually impossible for us to accept that all things are not here for us and for our purposes and pleasure, but that the exact opposite is true: we are here, ultimately, for Another’s happiness and enjoyment. Such a state of affairs may seem almost humiliating to accept: we, the servant subjects of a great King, exist only to do His bidding, to come at His command, and live only and merely for His pleasure. Seen in human terms, which are the ones with which we are mainly familiar, this appears to be the case. But turning once again to the BCP (p. 17) to the beginning of the *Collect For Peace*, we read:

“O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, **whose service is perfect freedom...**”

Although our worship is for His pleasure and purpose, the result for us is not slavery, nor the loss of self, nor subjugation of any sort, nor the diminishment of what we are, but the means to our highest exaltation. Thus, even on earth, J. S. Bach can sign all of his great musical manuscripts with *Soli Deo Gloria* (“To the Glory of God Alone”); the great scientist Galileo can write: “I render infinite thanks to God, for being so kind as to make me alone the first observer of marvels kept hidden in obscurity for all previous centuries.”; Michaelangelo, sculptor and painter, can confess: “Good painting is nothing else but a copy of the perfections of God and a reminder of His painting.”

The earth, the universe, are never in a greater state of delight than when they are busy in the worship of God. If man were in search of a panacea, something to cure all his ills, to safely involve him in an activity which will never, ever subtract from him anything except those things about himself which he neither needs nor benefit him in the slightest, then worshipping his Maker is the answer.

It is busily underway now in Heaven, as our Epistle assures us, even though it be so rarely found on earth. For us who believe in it and cherish it, our practice of it here is like a rehearsal for a far greater expression of it *there*.

We all know that the giving of ourselves to another, whether in love, or benevolence, or charity, is always an edifying act that makes us feel very good. It is a universal human experience. We are much the better for it. But no act of giving will ever create so much good for all parties involved, whether for us, the giver, or for the Almighty One who receives, or for the universe that witnesses it, than the worship of God.

Worship affirms the order with which the creation was first endowed. It serves mightily to undo the destructive, fragmenting power of sin. It works in silent, unknown, but immensely powerful ways against all those forces that conspire to ruin that which God both made and redeemed.

Thou art worthy, O lord... whether whispered, or spoken in prayer, or sung, or shouted, is both our duty and joy, as well as God's delight.

...and they rest not day and night, saying , Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was , and is, and is to come .

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.