

Divine Medicine

Preached on The Second Sunday in Advent
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ
Dec. 4, 2022
Text: Rom. 15: 4-13

The First Sunday of Advent we saw that a particular kind of love, the kind of love that we call charity, is not merely good will, or even self-sacrifice, but is specifically the supernatural love we have for God. Such love for God, St. Paul says, will never end, never disappoint, never fail, and through love for God Christians actualize the law. And we are made for charity. It is the fulfillment of our humanity; yet we cannot achieve it without the supernatural assistance of the Holy Spirit. We have this because we received the Holy Spirit, as well as other gifts, when we were baptized.

Christian Baptism has such a radical effect on the baptized child that Jesus and his Apostles said it effects a regeneration, a second birth, a heavenly birth. The child or adult, through the instruments of water and the spoken word, becomes an offspring of God the Father, a sibling of God the Son, as well as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Of course, that does not mean that the baptized child has moved beyond his nature as a human being. Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it. We were created to become God's offspring—that is fitting, meet and right, for human nature; but it is achievable only through the supernatural work of God.

The word the Church uses to speak of the grace bestowed in Baptism is the word “infusion.” Christian Baptism infuses the child with the virtue of supernatural love. What do we mean by “infusion?” A mundane example of infusion is the morning cup of coffee that many of us enjoy. What happens to water when it is boiled and added to ground coffee beans is that the water is “infused” with the essence of the coffee bean. It is still water, but in accordance with the nature of water it has been transformed into something richer. It has been infused.

This is not to be confused with *transfusion*. If we receive a transfusion of blood during an operation we have only received more blood; the intent was not to add anything but volume. But if we receive an IV drip of medicine we have received an infusion that is meant to add something that will change our state of being sick to a state of being well. Thus when we are baptized we are infused with the Heavenly gifts, specifically the virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and that makes it possible for us to existentially, really and truly, fulfill our God-given destiny as children of God. Furthermore, in order to nurture the supernatural gifts, we receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—his perfected human nature, his life, is being infused into our souls, renewing our lives, and growing the supernatural virtues.

There are two ways that Jesus' life is available to us: (1) through the sacraments and (2) in his life story given to us in the Scriptures. Learning and meditating on his life story in the Bible will also nurture the supernatural virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity while at the same time those infused virtues enable us to grasp the spiritual truth of the Scriptures. Through the grace of baptism and the loving care and teaching of the Church, we have entered quite literally into Jesus' life story, something we touched on last Sunday. And what makes our salvation and our destiny a reality is our participation in the humanity of Jesus, which is to say our participation in God's human nature. If Jesus is not truly God and truly man, then we are not saved and our destiny is to shuttle out of this mortal life into oblivion. It all depends on who the baby is that was born on December 25 some two thousand years ago.

There were heresies in the early years of the Church and each heresy, if it were true, would mean that our existence would end in oblivion. For example, there was a group in the early years of the Church called Ebionites. They were a group of Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but he was entirely human and not God. So they celebrated the Holy Communion only with water because wine was generally taken to be representative of the divine nature and water the human nature. If one is baptized into an Ebionite Jesus there is no infusion of grace because there is no divine nature to provide the Heavenly virtues. Even if such a Jesus were absolutely perfected human nature, there is nothing to be infused into our life. It is merely transfusion—and that means no new birth, no real grace, no destiny as offspring of God—nothing beyond the gravitational pull of this world.

On the other hand, there was another group called the Apollinarians or Monophysites who believed that Jesus was not truly, fully human because the Divine nature of God would have simply swallowed it up, overwhelmed, and eliminated anything like the full humanity of our Lord. According to this heresy, all that the Son joined with in the Incarnation was a skin bag. Thus the Godhead was merely clothed in flesh; but his was not a full human nature. The problem with being baptized into an Apollinarian Christ is that our human nature has been destroyed, not saved. And as St. Athanasius said, what is not assumed by Christ is not redeemed.

What the heresies all have in common is a denial of our true destiny in Christ. If our complete human nature is not savable, then it makes little sense to say *we* are saved at all. But the orthodox teaching is that we as complete persons fully participate in the divine life of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity because he is flesh of our flesh, and he has a human mind as well as true human emotions and a true human will.

The life story of Jesus the Messiah enfolds the life story of every single human being who has ever existed or every will exist, and that inclusion in Jesus' life story bestows ultimate meaning upon each person, as well as bestowing ultimate meaning to all of humanity. But Baptism not only enfolds our live together into Jesus' life story; it bestows the necessary grace to appropriate his life story so that we may existentially

make it our story. Our narrative has become part of God's narrative. Each of our stories has been assumed into Jesus's, and we therefore are responsible and equipped to appropriate his virtues and to transform our many stories into one great love story that we offer up to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our Epistle from St. Paul this morning, echoed in Thomas Cranmer's well-known Collect, we read that the Scriptures were written for our learning, and that by hearing them, reading, marking, and inwardly digesting them, "we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which [God] has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ." We are heirs to a hope as old as creation, a hope contained in "the promises made to the fathers," in particular Abraham. The Lord promised him that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Even before that, in the Garden of Eden, God turned to the serpent saying "cursed are you!" God then makes a promise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God would bring salvation into this world through a woman.

In Michaelangelo's great fresco on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the creation of Adam is depicted. Adam is reclining on the earth. God in heaven reaches out to touch him. Michaelangelo presents God in a swirling cloud surrounded by angels. Nestled in his arm is a woman paying close attention to the scene taking place. The woman is not Eve but Mary. She will fulfil the promise of God that from his people a Savior will come. Jesus Christ will take upon himself the judgment for our sins on the cross and bring salvation to humanity.

Jesus has absorbed the sin of the world and in a mysterious way destroyed its power over us. We now are beneficiaries of Divine anti-bodies, so to speak. To extend the previous metaphor, we are receiving an IV that is the result of sin's collision with the Godhead. A wonderful medicine has been created out of what was a fatal disease. Of course, no metaphor can really do justice to the mystery of how Jesus's Passion, Death, and Resurrection saves. All that our theories can do is nibble around the edges.

Of course, having the "right" theory will not save us. Only clinging to Christ can do that. If we are living our lives for him, then all the difficulties and tribulations of this world will not have us cowering in fear. Instead, we can lift up our heads, for we know that "the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

In the Name...