

Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

'Only take care, and keep your soul diligently.'

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'Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.'

What, then, comes out of a man?

'Evil thoughts', thoughts which connive, which scheme. Thoughts which seek to determine what can be gained, and careless of the expense. Thoughts which look not to the other in love, but look into the mirror with love; the love which gazes at your reflection, and perceives some mixture of adoration and hatred. Self-adoration. Self-hatred. Thoughts of self. *'Evil thoughts'*.

What, then, comes out of a man?

'Sexual immorality', *'adultery'*, thoughts of adultery, temptations to adultery, daydreams of adultery; daydreams, *sweet as stolen water*, to the corruption of our minds. And do not be deceived, for there is none who has not entertained such daydreams, for our Lord Himself declares *'Whosoever has lusted has committed adultery in his heart.'*

What, then, comes out of a man?

'Theft', for who does not desire something for nothing? And what is theft, but the desire to gain without the desire to work? Theft is nothing but sloth

made concrete. It is nothing but laziness transformed into an activity, for whosoever does not work, lives through theft.

What, then, comes out of a man?

'Murder', 'Slander', for

we would never think ourselves murderous, but our taste in movies, our taste in novels, our gossip, tell otherwise; for nothing pleases us more than to watch how one man was murdered, and how his murdering was avenged by the murder of

another. This we foolishly call 'crime and punishment', or even 'justice'. In reality, it is bloodlust and wrath with a patina, a thin veneer, of righteousness to seemingly coat it. We are too cowardly to avenge with violence our own received wrongs, so we live out such vengeance vicariously, through film, or through games, whatever be our cup of tea, or of blood.

And do not think yourselves guiltless if you do not dream of exacting violence on your enemies, for to those who do not wish physical violence against a person's body, they may still strike with reputational violence: slander, the spreading of gossip, the telling of unbecoming stories. If one may not slaughter his enemy, he can at least slaughter their name.

What, then, comes out of a man?

'Covetousness', 'Envy', 'Sensuality', for we believe that life is not worth living, if life be not filled with all the pleasures, delights, blessings, and talents that those around us possess. Such wickedness is not merely a sin against man, for often we never give expression to our envy. It is a sin against God; a cry against Him, demanding an answer to the question 'Why did you not give me more? Why do you hold out on me?' It is the sin of the *'pot calling out against the potter.'* But *'Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen vessels. Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work hath no handiness?'* It is the sin of ingratitude: of one who has received everything in his life, and yet still prays only a single syllable: *'more.'*

What, then, comes out of a man?

Finally, *'Pride,'*

the mother of all wickedness, and father of all sin; for there is no greater

evil than pride, than the voice that appropriates the words of the Lord and applies them to our twisted egos, the voice that calls from within the desperation of our hearts, *'I am my own god, and beside me, there is no other.'* This, then, is utmost *foolishness*, for *there is none like unto the Lord*, and it is demonic blasphemy, for *Satan 'opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to revile His name.'*

'All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

Who, then, remains undefiled? Who walks without sin?

*'If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?'*

'For if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'

'Therefore, all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.'

'And the wages of sin is death.'

'For there is none that doeth good, no, not one. All have gone astray.'

*For it is commanded
'only take care, and keep your soul diligently.'*

'And you would not.'

'For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?'

'Therefore let all the earth fear the LORD.'

'And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who destroys both body and soul in hell.'

'O Lord, who can stand?'

But it is written: 'With thee, there is forgiveness.'

'There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.'

Yet listen, dear Christians, there is something outside of a person that by going into him can purify him.

For from without, into the heart of man, come Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Spirit; come Enlightenment and the Forgiveness of all sin. Come the Eucharist, and with it the indwelling of the true flesh and blood of the immortal God. Come the Heavenly Word of the Lord and all wisdom, and with it every virtue. These things come from without, and purify a man.

Come, therefore, all ye sinners, and cross yourself in the remembrance of the blessed name of Baptism. Fold your hands and lift up your hearts in sacrifice to the God of your redemption, *praying at all times in the Spirit, for by prayer we contend not with flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities, against cosmic forces over this present darkness, and against spiritual darkness in the heavenly places.* Enter this sanctuary, and eat and drink the medicine of immortality, that the scourge of death have no power over you, but that the Lord of Life reign forever within you.

And leaving the Sanctum of this House today, be instructed by the words of Prophets and Apostles, and of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and lose yourself in holy humility. Forsake the darkness. Live unto your neighbor, and unto God.

For:

'The unfolding of His words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts:

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Ephesians 6:10-20; Mark 7:14-23.