

**Sermon for the Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost,
November 10, 2019**

Solemn Evensong & Benediction

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year C, Proper 27: Ecclesiasticus 51:13–22; Luke 14:12–24, Luke 15:1–7

At the Solemn Mass this morning, I was one of the ministers of the cup. I'm used to people trying to turn the cup a little when they take it from me, but this person turned the cup almost 180 degrees before drinking. The person was Caucasian, receiving after a person of color. For whatever reason, I think the person of color saw what happened. I've never seen this "chalice-turner" before. I'm not sure I would have spoken to her about it. But it made me sad. Then I began to wonder how I may turn from other people in my own way. Before I got to singing the wonderful postcommunion hymn, *Come, thou fount of every blessing*, the General Confession from 1928 Morning Prayer was racing through my mind. Some of you probably still know it by heart:

“Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But

thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders.
Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults.
Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy
promises declared unto mankind In Christ Jesus our
Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake;
That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober
life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.”¹

The current version in Rite One is gentler—gone are the words “and there is no health in us” and we are no longer “miserable offenders”²—theologically, these phrases are a challenge, in a sense, to the words of about God when God finished creating the heavens and the earth and all that is in it: “And God saw everything that [God] had made, and behold, it was very good.”³ Tonight’s second lesson, suggested that for Jesus, the person who seemed to me not to want to share the cup with someone was exactly in the right place for her to see the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

Today in our prayers, we remember Leo the Great, the bishop of Rome, who died on this day in the year 461. I found myself thinking about the encounter Father Ryan Lesh and I had, maybe fifteen years ago, when we

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 6.

² *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 41–42.

³ Genesis 1:31.

visited the early fifth-century baptistry of Saint John Lateran, Rome's cathedral church. It was not set up to be used as a pool for baptism by immersion—for which it was constructed. Instead, it was set up pour small amounts of water over a child's or an adult's head.

Ryan was also a student of Father Louis Weil. When Louis was in Rome two years later, he went and saw that it wasn't set up for anything, but he discovered that in a side chapel, there was a small family group, a small bowl of water, and a baptism going on. In a lecture he would give about sacramental signs, he suggested that Leo the Great would have had no idea what was going on in that chapel. That didn't mean that it wasn't valid, but validity is about a minimum, not meaning.

Now don't get any crazy ideas about me, but I've found myself thinking that if Leo the Great were to show up at our communion rail, he would wonder what we were putting in peoples' hands at most of the Eucharists celebrated at this altar—not to mention that it would be another 800 years before Eucharistic Adoration would be a part of our spirituality. But maybe the shared cup of wine and water, would clue him in. And maybe the wafer bread might just suggest food to him.

Father Weil reads the *Angelus*. Saint Mary's got full marks for the pictures of the baptism of Shalim. There was washing and there was chrismation, a sign that another child God of had died and risen in Jesus Christ. Until the end of time, Jesus will continue to eat with the us miserable offenders, because he came to bring us to his table, his feast, his eternity.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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