

**Let us Speak of Holiness this morning:**

**Bernard of Clairvaux**

A homily,

*Peter Menkin, Obl Cam OSB*

Church of Our Saviour (Episcopal)

Mill Valley, CA USA

Wednesday Eucharist, August 19, 2009

*Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 1994*

Ecclesiasticus 39: 1-10

John 15: 7-11

Psalm 139: 1-9

**In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**

Let us speak of Holiness this morning, God's Holiness, as we learn of Bernard of Clairvaux. This is his Feast Day in our Episcopal Church.

From a hymn attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot, born in 1090, at Fontaines, near Dijon, France:

*My Shepherd, now receive me; my Guardian, own me Thine.  
Great blessings Thou didst give me, O source of gifts divine.  
Thy lips have often fed me with words of truth and love;  
Thy Spirit oft hath led me to heavenly joys above.*

This is a request of God in Christ by a man who founded 162 monasteries, was a man who deeply admired Mary, Mother of God, and is considered a man of God's wisdom and holiness.

Herewith this is a remark, a statement, part of Psalm 139...

*You search out my path and my lying down, /and are acquainted with all my ways. /Even before a word is on my tongue,/ O Lord, you know it completely... /Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; /it is so high that I cannot attain it.*

Friend of God, yes. Man of God's wisdom, yes. Man of Holiness, yes.

Regarding Mary, history tells of Bernard:

He considered and admired the feminine in the holy, in the divine story, as Bernard played the leading role in the development of the Mary cult. One of the most important manifestations of the popular piety of the twelfth century, the Virgin Mary had played a minor role and it was only with the rise of emotional Christianity in the eleventh century that she became the prime

intercessor for humanity with the deity. She is sometimes referred to as the “fourth part of the Trinity,” for Mary is a feminine figure much admired and even referred to in prayer to this day. We pray,

*“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death...”*

A Cistercian Monk, Bernard, is considered in this manner by our readings today, reflecting the three-fold manner of his character and relationship with God and man. He died at Clairvaux, 21 August, 1153:

- **Bernard is wise, with the wisdom of God.**
- **Bernard is Holy, with a Holiness of God.**
- **Bernard is friend of God, as the New Testament tells us of friendship with God. This is the way to abide in God.**

Our Gospel, says:

*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

So part of our reading from John for today, tells us of Bernard’s love in Christ, and his friendship with God in Christ.

In this way is Bernard found wise, so another of our readings tells us:

*If the great Lord is willing,/ he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; /he will pour forth words of wisdom of his own/ and give thanks to the Lord in prayer./ The Lord will direct his counsel and knowledge, /as he meditates on his mysteries.*

So goes part of our reading from Ecclesiasticus (the Apocrypha) for today, tell us of Bernard’s wisdom.

It is as a holy man we remember Bernard of Clairvaux today.

An internet search on Answer.com received this definition of holiness: “The New Testament Greek word that translates KADOSH is HAGIOS. In the New Testament it is everywhere used of Christians. Christians are said to be HAGIOI (plural.) All the English translations here read ‘saints’. Paul writes letters to congregations in a dozen different cities, always beginning his letter, “To the saints in...( Corinth , Philippi , etc.) To be holy, a saint, is simply to be different.”

Holiness is that which allows us to be separate --as we are closer to and with God. It is that of separation as seen in *hagios* from *hagos*, which denotes "any matter of religious awe" (the Latin *sacer*); and that of sanctioned (*sancitus*). That which is *hosios* has received God's seal.

Thomas Aquinas says, "All who worship God may be called 'religious', but they are specially called so, who dedicate their whole lives to the Divine worship, and withdraw themselves from worldly concerns, just as those are not termed 'contemplatives' who merely contemplate, but those who devote their whole lives to contemplation". The saint adds: "And such men subject themselves to other men not for man's sake but for God's sake," words which afford us the keynote of religious life--so it is called.

What we are speaking of is the inner dynamic within and between God and man. And it has the most dramatic effects, bringing uprightness, happiness, yearning, treasuring, and delight.

The late Anglican Reverend Professor Daniel Hardy, defines Holiness.

*So holiness is not to be seen, but it is found in those whose hearts are formed by the inward laws given to Moses by the Lord. Moreover, it is found again in those whose hearts are formed by the consistent faithfulness of the Lord in the crucified and risen Christ. And the benefits go beyond what we saw in the passage from Nehemiah. Then there was uprightness, happiness, yearning, treasuring, delight, and their lives were filled with the unfathomable presence of the Lord, whose holiness and joy flooded their hearts. But now there is a 'spiriting' of human hearts that makes them responsive and responsible, a people affirmed by the Lord and marked by inner peace, meaning and purpose, faith, hope and love. All these rest on what we might call the three I's.*

Daniel Hardy explains more:

All these rest on what we might call three 'I's':

*(1) That the Lord is 'I am, always with you' -- ever faithful and loving to us; (2) That this Lord gives and 'spirits' another 'I', responsive to the 'I am' and responsible for us, who abides with us; (3) That this 'I am, always with you' gives and 'spirits' the 'I' that each of us is, to be responsive and responsible.*

Reverend Professor Daniel Hardy explains, also: When the 'I' that I am, or you are, is within the 'I' that Jesus is, and thereby with the 'I' that the Lord is, our hearts will burn within us as we remember him. There we will know holiness and peace, and give faith, hope and love to each other.

Bernard of Clairvaux writes in his paper on the Song of Songs:

*... (M)etaphor shows that we cannot of ourselves come to Christ in our Lord, unless he draws us by his grace, which is laid up in his storerooms: that is, in the mysteries of Faith, which God in his goodness and love for mankind hath revealed, first by his servant Moses in the Old Law in figure only, and afterwards in reality by his only begotten Son Jesus Christ...*

A Prayer attributed to Bernard goes:

*Jesus, the very thought of Thee  
With sweetness fills the breast;  
But sweeter far Thy face to see,  
And in Thy presence rest.*

*Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,  
Nor can the memory find  
A sweeter sound than Thy blessed Name,  
O Savior of mankind!*

We know that Bernard of Clairvaux, the historic figure of the Middle Ages, was a defender of the twelfth century Church, known for his ardor he preached love of God, “without measure.”

A Holy Man, we thank God on this day for his life.

Bernard is wise, with the wisdom of God. Bernard is Holy, with a Holiness of God. Bernard is friend of God, as the Gospel tells us of friendship with God.

- *May the lord bless us and keep us. Amen.*
- *May the Lord make his face to shine up us and be gracious to us. Amen.*
- *May the Lord life up his countenance upon us and give us peace. Amen.*