**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**1** “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. **2**  “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. **5** “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **6** But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. **16** “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **17** But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. **19**  “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20**  but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**“The King’s Wisdom”**

In the Name of the crucified King Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Savior, Amen. Tonight Lent begins and this penitential season does not allow us to wade into it slowly. We are more pushed in to hear that cannonball of a confession upon our lives, “Dust you are and to dust you shall return.” During our mid-week services this year, special attention will be upon various kings of old. We will contrast their lives at different times and places with the only true King there is for a sinful world. God has made this fact known, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill” Psalms 2:6. It is to the holy hill of the cross where the crucified king of glory outshines all others.

Now no other kings of men compared to Solomon. If you saw his kingdom, it was an elaborate display of success, beauty, and power all rolled into one. He expanded the borders and influence of Israel to heights beyond his father David. He built God’s temple in Jerusalem adorning it with gold, the finest materials, and extravagant furnishings. Beyond this splendor was a far more glorious king of the Jews. Solomon prayed for what other kings simply passed over. It was wisdom to rule God’s people. Such humility heard a promising Word, “Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days” 1 Kings 3:12-13.

Yet, no glorious amount of wisdom could cure the sinful heart of Solomon. His lips spoke plenty of wise sayings, but His life fell short. He says in the book of Proverbs, “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil” Proverbs (3:7). Solomon’s words stand true, but his life was one built on hypocrisy. He saw no evil in having 700 wives and 300 concubines. His ways were a form of self-worship, uncontrollable consumption, and finally showed no fear of the Lord. Scripture tell us, “For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father” 1 Kings 11:4. It seems the greater God showered Solomon with wisdom and glory, the greater the threat became for him to turn out to be a royal hypocrite.

Ash Wednesday acknowledges this hypocrisy grounded in our own lives. The world does not need say, “The church is full of hypocrites.” Christ already makes that known by speaking against the ways of the Pharisees. They made sure their giving, praying, and fasting was a show of spiritual glory. Before hammering too hard on them, take a good hard look at your own lives. The heart of the Pharisee is what sits in all our hearts. We do not blow the trumpet, but we have horns seeking praise for sacrifice in whatever we do. We do not pray in the streets, but outside of public worship, prayer falls short in our lives to other “pressing” needs and even breaks the promise we told others, “I will pray for you.” We do not fast like the Pharisaical show, but our self-denial looks to get something out of it or just ends up turning into a fad.

King Solomon and the Pharisees are not the only hearts seeped in royal hypocrisy. The mark of ashes on our foreheads proclaims this fact, “WE ARE.” All the children of Adam and Eve are dust and to dust we shall return. Our glory turns out not to be so glorious when all is said and done. Solomon confessed in his older years of life, “I kept my heart from no pleasure... Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” Ecclesiastes 2:10-11. Jesus displays this disillusionment of receiving rewards from men versus what our Father gives as a reward from Him. Yet, if the Father sees our two-faced lives as sinners, why should He give any reward to you or me?

The only answer must be because the Father is not half-hearted in what He says and does. There is no illusion only what the prophet Joel proclaimed, “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” He sees the sorry state of affairs. How darkened the hearts of men truly are by nature. His compassion is truly for all the generations of man. They are but dust and to dust they shall return, but God seeks to reward us with the gift He gives. He sends a true king wiser than Solomon, who has a more glorious throne in heaven, and a King of kings able to sacrifice in order to save sinners. Jesus is this king, God’s Son in flesh and blood, telling us tonight about true giving, fasting, and prayer. He instructs us about a Kingdom that none earns by works for the true treasure from the Father is faith in His Son.

Jesus the true king had not only wise words, but also walked without a hint of hypocrisy. His life was royalty sent from the Father in our flesh destined for glory greater than Solomon. It was to be the perfect sacrifice gloriously given to save sinners. As St. Paul proclaimed, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This righteousness used no trumpet, but gave freely to help the needy, but even opened His hands to nails covering up our greedy hands. This righteousness did not pray to impress, but turned to His Father apart from the crowds, prayed while His disciples slept, and even cried out in suffering to intercede for us. This righteousness was content to fast in the wilderness alone forty days facing the devil, spoke of Himself as the Bread of Life from heaven, and even thirsted on the cross for our selfishness.

This king is different from others kings. His glory does not fade away for it rests on the throne of the cross. His glory does not disappoint because in humility He died to be the sacrifice. His glory will not fail since it is wisdom in what God does for sinners. King Solomon wisely built a kingdom reflecting his own glory. Christ the crucified king built a kingdom reflecting the glorious love of His Father. In other words, it is in the foolishness of this king’s death why God forgives hypocrites. It is in the weakness of this king God shows strength to save the condemned. Jesus drags all your sin and guilt to His throne of grace. He triumphs over it by His resurrection and grants entrance into an eternal kingdom. This is the reward of the Father that none earns, but is purely the gift He gives in His Son.

Here is the true king not fashioned on worldly standards of health, wealth, and happiness. Instead, He hungers to absolve all who confess their sins showing no favoritism. He pours out His riches in baptism to crown us with glory and honor. He takes great pleasure to serve us at a royal table to eat and drink His true body and blood. Where the king is so is His kingdom. It does not come from gold, strength, or beauty of men but from One who has a selfless heart. Jesus is the crucified king found faithful to His bride the Church. From Him we have courage to serve in His kingdom with loving sacrifice toward our neighbor. The answer to hypocrisy is, “dust you are and to dust you shall return!” However, out of the dust a king builds a glorious kingdom unknown to any kings of the earth. Thanks be to God for our Lord Jesus Christ, let us in wisdom of faith take Him as His Word. Amen. In the Name of the Father, + the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.