

THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—VIII. Of the place and time of Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] and homily of the place and time of prayer. God through his almighty power, wisdom, and goodness created in the beginning heaven and earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the earth, the fishes in the sea, and all other creatures, for the use and commodity of man, whom also he had created to his own image and likeness, and given him the use and government over them all, to the end he should use them in such sort as he had given him in charge and commandment, and also that he should declare himself thankful and kind for all those benefits so liberally and so graciously bestowed upon him, utterly without any deserving on his behalf.

And although we ought at all times and in all places to have in remembrance and to be thankful to our gracious Lord, according as it is written, I will magnify the Lord at all times, and again, wheresoever the Lord beareth rule, O my soul, praise the Lord. Yet it appeareth to be God's good will and pleasure, that we should at special times and in special places gather ourselves together, to the intent his name might be renowned and his glory set forth in the congregation and the assembly of his saints. As concerning the time which Almighty God hath appointed his people to assemble together solemnly, it doth appear by the fourth commandment of God. Remember, saith God, that thou keep holy the Sabbath day, upon the which day, as is plain in the Acts of the Apostles, the people accustomedly resorted together, and heard diligently the law and the prophets read among them. And albeit this commandment of God doth not bind Christian people so straightly to observe and keep the utter ceremonies of the Sabbath day as it was given unto the Jews, as touching the forbearing of work and labour in time of great necessity, and as touching the precise keeping of the seventh day after the manner of the Jews. For we now keep the first day, which is our Sunday, and make that our

Sabbath, that is our day of rest, in the honour of our Saviour Christ, who has upon that day rose from death, conquering the same most triumphantly. Yet, notwithstanding, whatsoever is found in the commandment appertaining to the law of nature, as a thing most godly, most just, and needful for the setting forth of God's glory, it ought to be retained and kept of all good Christian people. And therefore, by this commandment, we ought to have a time, as one day in a week, wherein we ought to rest, yea, from our lawful and needful works. For like as it appeareth by this commandment, that no man in the six days ought to be slothful or idle, but diligently to labour in that state wherein God hath set him, even so God hath given express charge to all men, that upon the Sabbath day, which is now our Sunday, they should cease from all weekly and workday labour, to the intent that, like as God himself wrought six days, and rested the seventh, and blessed and sanctified it, and consecrated it to quietness and rest from labour, even so, God's obedient people should use the Sunday holily, and rest from their common and daily business, and also give themselves wholly to heavenly exercises of

God's true religion and service, so that God doth not only command the observation of this holy day, but also, by his own example, doth stir and provoke us to diligent keeping of the same.

Good natural children will not only become obedient to the commandment of their parents, but also have a diligent eye to their doings, and gladly follow the same. So if we be the children of our heavenly Father, we must be careful to keep the Christian Sabbath day, which is the Sunday, not only for that it is God's express commandment, but also to declare ourselves to be loving children in following the example of our gracious Lord and Father. Thus it may plainly appear that God's will and commandment was to have a solemn time and standing day in the week, wherein the people should come together and have in remembrance his wonderful benefits, and to render him thanks for them, as appertaineth to loving, kind, and obedient people. This example and commandment of God, the godly Christian people began to follow immediately after the ascension of our Lord Christ, and began to choose them a standing day in the week to come together in, yet not the seventh day, which the Jews kept, but the Lord's day, the day of the Lord's resurrection, the day after the seventh day, which is the first of the week. Of the which day mention is made by

[4 : 16] St. Paul on this wise, In the first day of the Sabbath let every man lay up what he thinketh good, meaning for the poor. By the first day of the Sabbath is meant our Sunday, which is the first day after the Jews' seventh day. And in the Apocalypse it is more plain, where, as St. John saith, I was in the Spirit upon the Sunday, sithence which time God's people hath always in all ages, without any gainsaying, used to come together upon the Sunday, to celebrate and honour the Lord's blessed name, and carefully to keep that day in holy rest and quietness, both men, women, child, servant, and stranger. For the transgression and breach of which day God hath declared himself much to be grieved, as it may appear by him who for gathering of sticks on the Sabbath day was stoned to death. But alas, all these notwithstanding, it is lamentable to see the wicked boldness of those that will be counted God's people, who pass nothing at all of keeping and hallowing the Sunday. And these people are of two sorts. The one sort, if they have any business to do, though there be no extreme need, they must not spare for the Sunday. They must ride and journey on the Sunday. They must drive and carry on the Sunday. They must row and ferry on the Sunday. They must buy and sell on the Sunday. They must keep markets and fares on the Sunday. Finally, they use all days alike. Work days and holy days are all one.

The other sort yet is worse. For although they will not travail nor labour on the Sunday as they do on the weekday, yet they will not rest in holiness, as God commandeth. But they rest in ungodliness and in filthiness, prancing in their pride, pranking and pricking, pointing and painting themselves, to be gorgeous and gay. They rest in excess and superfluity, in gluttony and drunkenness, like rats and swine. They rest in brawling and railing, in quarrelling and fighting.

They rest in wantonness, in toyish talking, in filthy fleshliness. So that it doth too evidently appear that God is more dishonoured and the devil better served on the Sunday than upon all the days in the week beside. And I assure you, the beasts which are commanded to rest on the Sunday honour God better than this kind of people, for they offend not God, they break not their holy day. Wherefore, O ye people of God, lay your hands upon your hearts, repent and amend this grievous and dangerous wickedness, stand in awe of the commandment of God, gladly follow the example of God himself, be not disobedient to the godly order of Christ's church, used and kept from the apostles' time until this day. Fear the displeasure and just plagues of Almighty God, if ye be negligent, and forbear not labouring and travailling on the Sabbath day or Sunday, and do not resort together to celebrate and magnify God's blessed name in quiet holiness and godly reverence. Now concerning the place where the people of God ought to resort together, and where especially they ought to celebrate and sanctify the Sabbath day, that is, the Sunday, the day of holy rest, that place is called God's temple or the church, because the company and congregation of God's people, which is properly called the church, doth there assemble themselves on the days appointed for such assemblies and meetings.

And forasmuch as Almighty God hath appointed a special time to be honoured in, it is very meet, godly, and also necessary, that there should be a place appointed where these people should meet and resort to serve their gracious God and merciful Father. Truth it is, the holy patriarchs for a great number of years had neither temple nor church to resort unto. The cause was, they were not stayed in any place, but were in a continual peregrination and wandering, that they could not conveniently build any church. But so soon as God had delivered his people from their enemies, and set them in some liberty in the wilderness, he set them up a costly and a curious tabernacle, which was, as it were, the parish church, a place to resort unto of the whole multitude, a place to have his sacrifices made in, and other observances and rites to be used in. Furthermore, after that God, according to the truth of his promise, had placed and quietly settled his people in the land of Canaan, now called Jury, he commanded a great and a magnificent temple to be builded by King Solomon, as seldom the like hath been seen, a temple so decked and adorned, so gorgeously garnished, as was meet and expedient for the people of that time, which would be allured and stirred with nothing so much as with such outward goodly gay things. This was now the temple of God, endued also with many gifts and sundry promises.

This was the parish church and the mother church of all Jewry. Here was God honoured and served. Hither was the whole realm of all the Israelites bound to come at three solemn fasts in the year, to serve their Lord God here. But let us proceed further. In the time of Christ and his apostles, there was yet no temples nor churches for Christian men, for why they were always for the most part in persecution, vexation and trouble, so that there could be no liberty nor license obtained for that purpose. Yet God delighted much that they should often resort together in a place, and therefore after his ascension they remained together in an upper chamber. Sometime they entered into the temple, sometime into the synagogues, sometime they were in prisons, sometime in their houses, sometime in the fields, etc. And this continued so long till the faith of Christ Jesus began to multiply in a great part of the world. Now when diverse realms were established in God's true religion, and God had given them peace and quietness, then began kings, noblemen, and the people also stirred up with a godly zeal and ferventness to build up temples and churches. Whither the people might resort, the better to do their duty towards God, and to keep holy their Sabbath day, the day of rest. And to these temples have the

[10 : 02] Christians customably used to resort from time to time, as unto meet places where they might with common consent praise and magnify God's name, yielding him thanks for the benefits that he daily poureth upon them, both mercifully and abundantly, where they might also hear his holy word read, expounded, and preached sincerely, and receive his holy sacraments ministered unto them duly and purely.

True it is that the chief and special temples of God, wherein he hath greatest pleasure, and most delighted to dwell in, are the bodies and minds of true Christians, and the chosen people of God, according to the doctrine of holy scriptures declared by Saint Paul, Know ye not, saith he, that ye be the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God doth dwell in you, the temple of God is holy, which ye are. And again in the same epistle, Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost dwelling in you, whom you have given you of God, and that ye be not your own.

Yet this notwithstanding, God doth allow the material temple made of lime and stone, so oft as his people do come together into it to praise his holy name, to be his house, and the place where he hath promised to be present, and where he will hear the prayers of them that call upon him. The which thing both Christ and his apostles, with all the rest of holy fathers, do sufficiently declare by this, that, albeit they certainly knew that their prayers were heard in what place soever they made them, though it were in caves and woods and in deserts, yet so oft as they could conveniently, they resorted to the material temples, there with the rest of the congregation to join in prayer and true worship. Wherefore, dearly beloved, you that profess yourselves to be Christians, and glory in that name, disdain not to follow the example of your master Christ, whose scholars, you say, ye be, show you to be like them whose schoolmates you take upon you to be, that is, the apostles and disciples of Christ, lift up pure hands with clean hearts in all places and all times, but do the same in the temples and churches upon the Sabbath days also. Our godly predecessors and the ancient fathers of the primitive church spared not their goods to build churches, no, they spared not to venture their lives in time of persecution, and to hazard their blood, that they might assemble themselves together in churches. And shall we spare a little labour to come unto churches? Shall neither their example, nor our duty, nor the commodities that thereby should come unto us move us? If we will declare ourselves to have the fear of God, if we will show ourselves true Christians, if we will be the followers of Christ our Master, and of those godly fathers that have lived before us, and now have received the reward of true and faithful Christians, we must both willingly, earnestly, and reverently come unto the material churches and temples to pray, as unto fit places appointed for that use, and that upon the Sabbath day, as at most convenient time for God's people to cease from bodily and worldly business, to give themselves to holy rest and godly contemplation pertaining to the service of Almighty God, whereby we may reconcile ourselves to God, be partakers of his reverent sacraments, and be devout hearers of his holy word, so to be established in faith to Godward, in hope against all adversity, and in charity toward our neighbours, and thus, running our course as good Christian people, we may at the last attain the reward of everlasting glory, through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory. Amen.

It hath been declared unto you, good Christian people, in the former sermon read unto you, at what time and to what place ye shall come together to praise God. Now I intend to set before your eyes, first, how zealous and desirous ye ought to be to come to your church, secondly, how sore God is grieved with them that do despise or little regard to come to the church upon the holy restful day. It may well appear by the scriptures that many of the godly Israelites, being now in captivity for their sins among the Babylonians, full often wished and desired to be again at Jerusalem, and at their return through God's goodness, though many of the people were negligent, yet the fathers were marvellous devout to build up the temple, that God's people might repair thither to honour him.

And King David, when he was a banished man out of his country, out of Jerusalem the holy city, from the sanctuary, from the holy place, and from the tabernacle of God, what desire, what ferventness was in him towards that holy place?

[14 : 36] What wishings and prayers made he to God to be a dweller in the house of the Lord? One thing, saith he, have I asked of the Lord, and this will I still crave, that I may resort and have my dwelling in the house of the Lord so long as I live.

Again, oh how I joyed when I heard those words, we shall go into the Lord's house, and in other places of the Psalms he declareth for what intent and purpose he hath such a fervent desire to enter into the temple and church of the Lord.

I will fall down, saith he, and worship in the holy temple of the Lord. Again, I have appeared in thy holy place, that I might behold thy might and power, that I might behold thy glory and magnificence.

Finally he saith, I will show forth thy name to my brethren. I will praise thee in the middens of the congregation. Why then had David such an earnest desire to the house of God?

First, because there he would worship and honour God. Secondly, there he would have a contemplation and a sight of the power and glory of God. Thirdly, there he would praise the name of God with all the congregation and company of the people.

[15 : 40] These considerations of this blessed prophet of God ought to stir up and kindle in us the like earnest desire to resort to the church, especially upon the holy restful days, there to do our duties and to serve God, there to call to remembrance how God, even of his mere mercy and for the glory of his namesake, worketh mightily to conserve in us health and wealth and godliness, and mightily preserveth us from the assaults and rages of our fierce and cruel enemies, and there joyfully in the number of his faithful people to praise and magnify the Lord's holy name.

Set before your eyes also that ancient father Simeon, of whom the scripture speaketh thus to his great commendation and encouragement for us to do the like. There was a man at Jerusalem named Simeon, a just man fearing God.

He came by the Spirit of God into the temple and was told by the same Spirit that he should not die before he saw the anointed of the Lord. In the temple his promise was fulfilled. In the temple he saw Christ and took him in his arms.

In the temple he brassed out into the mighty praise of God his Lord. Anna also, a prophetess, an old widow, departed not out of the temple, giving herself to prayer and fasting day and night.

And she, coming about the same time, was likewise inspired and confessed and spake of the Lord to all them who looked for the redemption of Israel. This blessed man and this blessed woman were not disappointed of wonderful fruit, commodity and comfort which God sent them by their diligent resorting to God's holy temple.

[17 : 14] Now ye shall hear how grievously God hath been offended with his people, for that they passed so little upon his holy temple, and foully either despised or abused the same, which thing may plainly appear by the notable plagues and punishments which God hath laid upon his people, especially in this, that he stirred up their adversaries horribly to beat down and utterly to destroy his holy temple with a perpetual desolation.

Alas, how many churches, countries and kingdoms of Christian people have of late years been plucked down, overrun and left waste, with grievous and intolerable tyranny and cruelty of the enemy of the Lord Christ, the great Turk, who hath so universally scourged the Christians that never the like was heard or read of.

Above thirty years past, the great Turk had overrun, conquered and brought into his dominion and subjection twenty Christian kingdoms, turning away the people from the faith of Christ, poisoning them with the devilish religion of wicked Muhammad, and either destroying their churches utterly or filthily abusing them with their wicked and detestable errors.

And now this great Turk, this bitter and sharp scourge of God's vengeance, is even at hand in this part of Christendom, in Europe, at the borders of Italy, at the borders of Germany, greedily gaping to devour us, to overrun our country, to destroy our churches also, unless we repent our sinful life and resort more diligently to the church to honour God, to learn his blessed will and to fulfil the same.

The Jews in their time provoked justly the vengeance of God, for that partly they abused his holy temple with the detestable idolatry of the heathen and superstitious vanities of their own inventions, contrary to God's commandment.

[18 : 56] Partly they resorted unto it as hypocrites, spotted, imbrued and foully defiled with all kind of wickedness and sinful life. Partly many of them passed little upon the holy temple, and forced not whether they came thither or no.

And have not the Christians of late days, and even in our days also, in like manner provoked the displeasure and indignation of Almighty God, partly because they have profaned and defiled their churches with heathenish and Jewish abuses, with images and idols, with numbers of altars too, too superstitiously and intolerably abused, with gross abusing and filthy corrupting of the Lord's Holy Supper, the blessed sacrament of his body and blood, with an infinite number of toys and trifles of their own devices, to make a goodly outward show, and to deface the homely, simple and sincere religion of Christ Jesus.

Partly they resort to the church like hypocrites, full of all iniquity and sinful life, having a vain and a dangerous fancy and persuasion, that, if they come to the church, besprinkle them with holy water, hear a mass, and be blessed with the chalice, though they understand not one word of the whole service, nor feel one motion of repentance in their hearts, all is well, all is sure.

Fie upon such mocking and blaspheming of God's holy ordinance! Churches were made for another purpose, that is, to resort thither, and to serve God truly, there to learn his blessed will, there to call upon his mighty name, there to use the holy sacraments, there to travail how to be in charity with thy neighbour, there to have thy poor and needy neighbour in remembrance, from thence to depart better and more godly than thou camest thither.

Finally, God's vengeance hath been and is daily provoked, because much wicked people pass nothing to resort to the church, either for that they are so sore-blinded, that they understand nothing of God and godliness, and care not with devilish example to offend their neighbours, or else for that they see the church altogether scoured of such gay gazing sights, as their gross fantasy was greatly delighted with, because they see the false religion abandoned, and the true restored, which seemeth an unsavoury thing to their unsavoury taste, as may appear by this, that a woman said to her neighbour, Alas, gossip, what shall we now do at church, since all the saints are taken away, since all the goodly sights we will want to have are gone, since we cannot hear the like piping, singing, chanting, and playing upon the organs that we could be for?

[21 : 19] But, dearly beloved, we ought greatly to rejoice and give God thanks, that our churches are delivered of all those things which displeased God so sore, and filthily defiled his holy house and his place of prayer, for the which he hath justly destroyed many nations, according to the saying of St. Paul, If any man defile the temple of God, God will him destroy.

And this ought we greatly to praise God for, that such superstitious and idolatrous manners, as were utterly nought and defaced God's glory, are utterly abolished, as they most justly deserved, and yet those things that either God was honoured with, or his people edified, are decently retained, and in our churches comely practised.

But now, forasmuch as ye perceive it is God's determinate pleasure, ye should resort unto your churches upon the day of holy rest, seeing ye hear what displeasure God conceiveth, what plagues he poureth upon his disobedient people, seeing ye understand what blessings of God are given, what heavenly commodities come, to such people as desirously and zealously used to resort unto their churches, seeing also ye are now friendly bidden and jointly called, beware that ye slack not your duty.

Take heed that you suffer nothing to let you, hereafter to come to the church at such times as you are orderly appointed and commanded. Our Saviour Christ telleth in a parable, that a great supper was prepared, guests were bidden, many excused themselves and would not come.

I tell you, saith Christ, none of them that were called shall taste of my supper. This great supper is the true religion of Almighty God, wherewith he will be worshipped in the due receiving of his sacraments, and sincere preaching and hearing his holy word, and practising the same by godly conversation.

[23 : 01] This feast is now prepared in God's banqueting house, the church. You are thereunto called and jointly bidden. If you refuse to come and make your excuses, the same will be answered to you that was unto them.

Now come therefore, dearly beloved, without delay, and cheerfully enter into God's feasting house, and become partakers of the benefits provided and prepared for you. But see that ye come hither with your holy day garment, not like hypocrites, not of a custom and for manner's sake, not with lost someness, as though ye had rather not come than come, if ye were at your liberty.

For God hateth and punisheth such counterfeit hypocrites, as appeareth by Christ's former parable. My friend, saith God, how camest thou in without a wedding garment? And therefore commanded his servants to bind him hand and foot, and to cast him into the utter darkness, where shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

To the intent ye may avoid the like danger at God's hand, come to the church on the holy day, and come in your holy day garment. That is to say, come with a cheerful and a godly mind, come to seek God's glory, and to be thankful unto him.

Come to be at one with thy neighbour, and to enter in friendship and charity with him. Consider that all thy doings stink before the face of God, if thou be not in charity with thy neighbour.

[24 : 18] Come with an heart sifted and cleansed from worldly and carnal affections and desires. Shake off all vain thoughts, which may hinder thee from God's true service. The bird, when she will flee, shaketh her wings.

Shake and prepare thyself to flee higher than all the birds in the air. That, after thy duty duly done in this earthly temple and church, thou mayest flee up, and be received into the glorious temple of God in heaven, through Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all glory and honour.

Amen.