

OCULI (LENT 3)

Ephesians 5:1-9

Be

“*It is good,*” God said when He made mankind. “*Be*” was understood. Adam didn’t have to ask what God meant. He knew. In the middle of the Garden, God planted the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. “*Be,*” He said, as He told our first parents not to eat of it, even as the Serpent advertised it with all his wily might. “*Just be.*”

“*It is good,*” God said in our Baptism. “*Be*” was understood, with no need to ask what He meant. “*Be,*” He said, even as He sent us out into a world replete with the poisonous progeny of that tree that became the world’s first idol, even as the serpent advertises this deadly fruit with all his wily might. “*You are my own redeemed child,*” God said. “*Be.*”

“*Be,*” St. Paul says. He need not say more, although he will. “*Be what you are*”—an odd command, even an obvious command, like telling the dog to growl, the cow to moo, or the Lions to lose, but a command nonetheless: “*Be.*” So why command it? He commands it because there are terrible consequences when we are not. “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”

As Adam’s “*Be*” went back to creation, our “*Be*” goes back to redemption. By the cross “*you are.*” Christ’s “*for us*” molds our “*for Him.*” “*Be,*” because you became what you are at a price, and, if you will not “*Be,*” you will “*not be,*” and Christ did not die for you to “*not be.*”

The beginning and end of this text are “*Be,*” with “*Be not*” sandwiched in between. But a “*Be not*” is in essence a “*Be*” carried out to its logical conclusions. “*Be what you are, not what you are not, and, if you are what you are, you will not be these things.*”

“*Be not sexually immoral.*” Let faith guide your passions lest passions strangle your faith. St. Paul does not say, “*Be not sexual,*” but, “*Be not sexually immoral,*” and there is a big difference. St. Paul does not say “*Let not sex be named among you,*” but “*Let not sexual immorality, impurity, or covetousness be named among you*” and there is a big difference.

Impurity is the blossom of covetousness rotten seeds. We desire what we ought not have or what we may have in a way we ought not have it, and that desire, which ought to be chased out of our heads and hearts like bats in the belfry, allowed to stew and marinate, gives birth to impurity, the surrender of “*Be*” to “*Be not.*” Self-gratification suddenly looms larger than salvation; a moment’s indulgence seems a better investment than eternal blessedness. “*Such is improper among the saints,*” St. Paul says. “*Those who would continue in such things without repentance have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.*” And it’s true. They’ve let go of their Baptism to take hold of the devil’s fruit.

“*Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place.*” Filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking are out of place among for the same reason sexual sins

are. These things make light of what God would have us take seriously, make base what God has called good. Jesus is the Word, and He has revealed the Father to us in words, and to take words and put them in the service of anyone but Him and our neighbor is to abuse them. Such is foolishness, and has no place among God's saints.

"Let no one deceive you with empty words." And empty words are just what we want when we are in sin and unwilling to get out of it. But the absolution proclaims, not, "It's okay in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," but, "I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit," with a big old cross drawn down the middle. We do right to forgive sin, but only harm to say it's okay. Okay didn't nail God to a tree. Forgiveness did.

Empty words say its okay, whether to false morals or false belief. But such words have no place in the kingdom of God. Such words only "*bring wrath.*" They are directions to hell veiled in the language of heaven. As children of God, we only "*be*" when we "*speak the truth in love,*" and the two cannot be divorced. Approval or acceptance is not forgiveness. Forgiveness washes sin away; it does not rename it. There is no love apart from truth and no truth apart from love, because both emanate from Him who is both. "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life,*" Jesus says.

So what, then? "*Be.*" "But I have not been?" you may think, and you're right. We have not been. "*But be,*" St. Paul says. Reclaim your inheritance. The devil's fruit can rot in hell without you. Be renewed and regenerated. Jump back into the water of life. Take refuge in the wounds of the Savior who "*gave Himself in death as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,*" who still gives Himself in life for you in remembrance of that sacrifice.

Through faith, St. Paul calls us children of God. The Prodigal Son was subject to danger as he wandered, but, before it was too late, he saw his foolishness and came back to his father, who stretched out his protecting arms like Christ on the cross and received him, who slaughtered the fattened calf to feed him with the sign of his forgiving love.

Your Savior's arms are still extended, and, in them, your Father longs to embrace you with His protection from the hell that has wooed you, to feed you with the sign of His love, the very slaughtered Flesh and Blood of His only-begotten. You may have been darkness, but, in Christ, God longs again to call you light. "*Be light.*"

"*Be.*" Break off your associations with what is not. Cling to those associations that make you what you are. Reconnect with the Father through the Son and by the Spirit, and with His fellow children in the Body of Christ, the Church. Huddle together in the Light and together "*Be,*" because that is what you do when you are what God has made you. Amen.