



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Third Sunday After Easter, May 7th, 2017

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

There is something curiously antique to 21st Century ears about the notion of abstaining from "fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." It's wildly out of step with a generation whose primary motivation is immediate self-gratification and whose motto is "just do it."

But, actually, the era in which St. Peter wrote his first round robin to the Apostolic Church was very similar to our own. What he was warning his flock about were attitudes, behaviors and activities that were generally regarded as perfectly natural and normal – harmless even – but that presented enormous spiritual dangers.

St. John had the same opinion, writing in the second chapter of his First General Epistle: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world."

In a society dominated by TV reality shows, steamy Hollywood movies and sexual freedom, it's hard imagine such obviously dated concepts being relevant to the ordinary John and Jane Doe.

But Satan has been exploiting these same human weaknesses – lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – to blind human beings to God ever since he got Adam and Eve kicked out of the Garden of Eden. His maxim is clear: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

The old temptations work so well because when it comes to sin, human beings seem quite incapable of learning from the past. We fall for the same old tricks – just as our parents did before us. Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life does the trick every time.

It worked when Satan tempted Eve to try the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden — and I quote: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food (*lust of the flesh*), and that it was pleasant to the eyes (*lust of the eyes*), and a tree to be desired to make one wise (*pride of life*) she took of the fruit thereof and did eat.

Eve persuaded herself that eating the forbidden fruit was the practical thing to do; the attractive thing to do; and, ultimately, the prestigious thing to do. The serpent really didn't have to do any work at all. He

just had to put the suggestion into her head and she sold it to herself.

The amazing thing is that the devil tried exactly the same temptations -- though in a slightly different order on Jesus. First, he tempted him to turn stones into bread (*Lust of the flesh*). Then he tempted Jesus to cast himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, so that when the angels saved him, he would prove his divinity to the crowd (*The pride of life*). Lastly, he took Jesus up to a high mountain and showed him all the beauty of the earth and offered it all to him (*Lust of the eyes*).

Okay. So it didn't work with Jesus. But he is perfect and we are very far from that happy condition. And throughout the centuries these same three temptations have seduced us into committing all seven Cardinal Sins, sometimes every single one of them at the same time.

While they might sound a tad old fashioned, they are, in fact, amazingly powerful. And the most powerful of all is pride. Indeed, pride was the primary reason for Eve taking a bite out of the forbidden fruit. She swallowed Satan's lie: "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be open, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

She got it into her head that she could do God's job better than he can. And when it comes down to it, this is the root of all our sin. Indeed, it is the original sin because her descendants have been trying to do God's job ever since.

Whenever we dismiss God's advice as old fashioned and out of touch, we are, in effect, claiming to know better than God. When we question the notion that God can perform miracles, we are arrogantly assuming that

the Creator of our entire Universe has no more power than we, his creatures, enjoy.

But if pride poisons our relationship with God, it also poisons our relationships with our fellows -- especially those closest to us. It is pride that requires us always to be right; pride that makes us struggle to dominate our spouses, our children, our co-workers. And it is pride that refuses to admit the need to say "I'm sorry."

It's ironic that even though pride is quite plainly the source of so much trouble, we insist on instilling it into our children. If pride really is some sort of virtue, there is so much of it around it should surely be fostering social harmony on a grand scale. But we know from long and bitter experience it most certainly isn't doing that.

Pride promotes only discord -- ethnic discord, civic discord, discord in the home and discord among the sexes. So if pride does, indeed, promote discord, dissension and hatred, perhaps it's time to give its give its antithesis -- humility -- a try.

It's a fact proven time and time again that humility actively promotes peace and understanding -- harmony in fact. Sad to say, I don't see many people turning out for "National Humility Week." After all, it simply isn't human, is it?

Surprising though it might seem, however, God does practice humility, constantly. For example, he sent his Son to make the ultimate sacrifice not for people who are his equals, but for us -- creatures that, compared with him, are lower even than cockroaches. This should help us understand our place in his great scheme of things -- if only we had the humility to realize it. *AMEN*