

A WORLD IN TUMULT
A Sermon for Sexagesima, 2011
On the Text: Propers for the Day
By the Reverend Doctor Randolph Constantine

The events of the past few weeks have turned our world into a world in tumult. Our situation today is not unlike what happened in northern Italy back in the Spring of 568, when the Lombard horde under the command of Alboin crossed the Alps swept down out of the north, bent on conquest. They were virtually unopposed. News of this invasion so alarmed Pope John III, that he appointed the three Sundays before the beginning of Lent to be Days of Prayer on which they should implore the Lord to “mercifully deliver” His people from this enemy. The first of those three Sundays came to be known as Septuagesima. The collect for Septuagesima is little changed since then except to be translated into English from the Latin. In your Prayer Book on page 118, you can read these words: “O Lord, we beseech Thee to hear the prayers of Thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, ...” .

In less than 2 years, the Lombards had conquered all of Italy north of the Po River except for the City of Pavia. They continued to work south until they had even conquered Modena and Bologna before stopping at the Apennines. They never even got close to Rome, so the Pope’s prayers were answered; but the northern region of Italy has been called Lombardy for many, many years.

Two years ago, Bishop Grote sent us this story about the Lombard invasion and Pope John the third and how this led to the setting aside of the “Gesima” Sundays for the Pre-Lenten season. A look at the situation in the world at large and in the United States in particular might suggest that we should imitate that early Pope and hit our knees in Prayer for Peace and sanity in the world. The entire Muslim world, with the possible exception of Indonesia is exploding with riots and demonstrations against whoever is in power, because the current leader is either not conservative enough, or he is not liberal enough.

Sometimes the mobs contain people on both sides of that liberal/conservative divide; but they are not fighting each other, because in the Muslim world, they mostly agree, in the short term at least, that “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” However, what is becoming more and more obvious is that radical Muslims are not only **not** the friends of Christians; they are in fact our enemies. This can be seen in Egypt with the Army that is now in power attacking the Coptic Christians, and other Muslims of various sects attacking Christians in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan; often with government support, or with the governments’ turning a blind eye to such crimes.

And where is Israel, the homeland of the Jews and the birth place of Jesus Christ and Christianity, in all this? Right in the middle of it and almost completely surrounded by Muslim countries, again threatened by an outside force. In our OT lesson, God is speaking to Isaiah about the unfaithful Hebrews who did not want to hear the truth of God’s word, where he says in

verse 9 of Isaiah 30 ⁹That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: ¹⁰Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits”; but He could just as well be speaking to the radical Muslims who also do not want to hear God’s word, who think that it is right and proper to lie to those who are not Muslim, and that it is not murder to kill all who are not Muslims.

We are not immune to this in our supposed isolation in the United States. We have just had an Islamic terrorist arrested in Texas this past week. We have had an Islamic radical who had infiltrated into the US Army and attained the rank of Major to kill 13 soldiers and wound many more. We have a president who says he is a Christian, but who kisses the hands of Arabs and seldom goes to church. Each Sunday we pray, after the manner of Pope John the 3rd that God will, “Grant to the President of the United States and all in authority, wisdom and strength to know and to do Thy will.” Is our prayer being heard? Of course it is. Is it being acted on by God in the way that we wish? Possibly not. When the tribe of Judah had been hauled off to Babylon and had been there only one or two years, don’t you think that the remnant of the devout Jews were praying similar prayers? But then, in that situation, they had to wait for the rest of the 70 years to pass before Darius came to their rescue.

Why are we, here in the United States, having the problems we are having? Thirty years ago, I would have scoffed at what I am about to say, but now I say it in all seriousness. I think that in 1950 this was still a Christian nation, at least it was on the surface. The churches were full every Sunday, and public piety and prayer were not frowned upon. Even so, the seeds of dissolution had been being sown for many years and were just beginning to bear fruit. The weed seed of the tares sown by the devil could grow on the thin and rocky soil that rejected the good seed sown by God, just as we see around here where often the first thing that comes up in the spring in a patch of bare ground is a thistle.

The 1950s are often looked upon by many as a time of peace and prosperity – peace if you forget about Korea and the Cold War. Yes, there was prosperity, but there was also an undercurrent of libertinism in society that came to its full expression in the 1960s, when there was a descent into libertinism and licentiousness even worse than that of the Roaring Twenties. How do I know this? I saw it and lived through it. I entered High School in 1951, graduated in 1955, and went off to college in the fall of 1955. Playboy magazine was first published in 1953. The veneer of public piety and culture wore thin and was discarded. With prosperity, the United States and the rest of the western world became more and more secular. Marxists continued their infiltration of colleges and universities. That smooth, wide road to hell continued being paved by the Good Intentions Paving Company. For those who preferred another mode of transportation, handbaskets were being woven.

The churches were infected too. On a human time scale, this was a slow infection. It could be said to have begun back in the late 18th century in the works of the philosophers Kant and Hegel, which led to the beginnings of new methods of Biblical criticism that ultimately led to criticism of religion itself. All that set the stage for the slow erosion of doctrine in the

mainline Protestant churches that has led us to what we see now. – that if a person seems to be mistreated by society because he or she is living in a state of what used to be called SIN, and is indeed still called sin by the Bible, well then, we just have to change the doctrine of the church and ignore what the Bible says, because “Social Justice” and “fairness” are more important. The Church is supposed to go along with society and say that what ever it is that they do is blessed, and is not a sin.

Is it any wonder then, with what has happened in this country, in Europe, and especially Britain, that God might be taking away our lampstand, the source of the light of Christ in our churches? What do I mean by this phrase, taking away our lampstand? Jesus says this to John, the apostle He loved, in Revelation 2:1-5

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

What is the significance of the Lampstand? Think back to Exodus 25:31-40 where God describes to Moses the Lampstand that must be made that must burn continually in the Holy Place, just outside the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant would be. This same Lampstand would go in the Holy place in the Temple once it was built as described in First Chronicles 28:15 and Second Chronicles 13:11. We do not know this, but we may assume that in the churches of the Jewish Christians that there was a menorah, which was a seven-branched lampstand, just like the one in the Holy Place and the one that burned for 8 days on only one day's supply of oil. The Lampstands in Revelation are symbolic of Christ's blessing on each church. A church without a Lampstand given to them by God is not blessed by Christ and is thus not really a church. Some have suggested that our national Lampstand was taken when high winds blew over the national Christmas Tree just 8 days ago on February 19th. It had stood in Washington since 1978. Was it symbolic of our national Lampstand? I would not dare to guess.

This was to have been a day on which the minister usually expounds on what Jesus says in the middle of the Gospel lesson after Jesus explains the various types of soil on which the seed fell and what happened to them. In verse 9, the disciples ask Him to tell them the meaning of the parable, and He does: Luke 8:9-10 9 And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, 10 he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" This tells us that the disciples of Jesus Christ, which partly is supposed to mean us, have been given the understanding of certain mysteries; just as in last Sunday's Gospel lesson, the message to all of us is that we are invited to work in the Lord's vineyard, and that the reward is the same for all, no matter when a person came to work there – eternal life. The events of the past few

weeks let us know that there are mysteries we shall not know the answer to until the Last day, mysteries such as what was God's plan and when the Last Day shall be. I do not pretend to know the answers to such questions. Hymn 538, which we sang a few weeks ago, is equally noncommittal as to when God's purpose will be fulfilled, as it says: **God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year; God is working His purpose out, and the Time is drawing near.**

Has God taken away the world's Lampstand, or has He taken away any Lampstands? We can't really say. That is another mystery that is not for us to know. What we can know is that we can look out and see that the general moral and spiritual state of the world is probably a lot worse than it was 60 years ago, at least from Afghanistan west to the United States, while things may actually be a little better in China and Russia. What ever is true there, things definitely do not look good for the United States.

What can we do about it? Work, Study, and Pray. That is the rule of life of Andrewes Hall Seminary down in Phoenix. Every time a situation prompts this kind of sermon, I am reminded of what God said to Solomon after the dedication of the Temple in 2 Chronicles 7:12-14 12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him:

"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, 14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

I beg you all: Humble yourselves, repent in this penitential season, and Pray as you have never prayed before, that God will heal our land and this wounded and broken world, that He will, in the words of last Sunday's Collect, **mercifully deliver us.**

AMEN!