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Qualifications of Christian Leadership

Sermon Preached By Rt. Rev. Thomas F. Gailor, D. D., Bishop of Tennessee, at Consecration of Bishop Denby.

"I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen in the flesh. (Romans ix:3.)

The love of one's own race and loyalty to its welfare is a primordial instinct implanted in us by God.

St. Paul, who more than any other man, was God's instrument in the founding of the Christian church, who for that reason was hated by the Jews and made the victim of their relentless persecution and calumny, never wavered for a moment in his love and in his loyal effort for what he believed was the best interest of Israel. The true Israel, he said, has not been discredited nor abandoned, but has become complete in Jesus Christ. So in this epistle his heart yearns for his own people scattered throughout the empire, oppressed, despised and hating Roman and Christian with spiritual pride and exclusive bigotry, and he breaks out in the passionate appeal, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for their sake." "My heart's desire and prayer for Israel is that they might be saved," and he concludes with the vehement assertion, "I know all Israel shall be saved." This is the way in which the Apostle to the Gentiles loved his own people, and though he lived for Christ, suffered for Christ and died for Christ, he was, first, last and all the time a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Jew in every beat of his heart and every thought of his mind.

We are assembled here today to consecrate a Bishop, a leader and overseer in the church, who shall devote himself exclusively to work among his own people and give his life and thought to the moral and spiritual uplift of the Negro race.

There is no nobler nor truer dedication of a man's life than that unselfish service in the name and faith of Christ to his own kindred and people; and it marks an epoch in the history of the American Episcopal Church, when leadership so important and so significant is entrusted to one of its own Negro priests. Its importance cannot easily be overestimated.

"There are now about 10,000,000 people of Negro blood in the United States," Bishop Gailor said. "Under the federal constitution they are eligible to all the privileges of citizenship and are guaranteed the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. During the past fifty years, with the encouragement and assistance of the white people, many individuals of the race have shown marked ability to take advantage of the opportunities which our American democracy has afforded them. Many thousand acres of land are owned by Negroes; many financial institutions are controlled by them; many schools and colleges are administered by them. And yet, as a race, the Negro in America has still great need of direction and leadership.

"According to Bishop Thirkield, at one time president of Howard university, the Negro death rate is twice as high as that of the whites, and the death rate from tuberculosis three times as great; and there is a low moral standard, and ignorance and improvidence are prevalent among the masses. According to the last census report not more than 3,745,538 belong to any Christian denomination. That leaves more than 6,000,000 who are unchurched. Certainly here is a call to leadership and direction which it were treason to Christianity to ignore."

What, then are the qualifications for Christian leadership? They are four, viz.:

1. A leader must have a clear conviction in his own mind of the goal towards which he is leading his followers.

2. He must have a clear and definite conviction of the means and method whereby that goal is to be obtained.

3. He must be endowed with sympathy to know and understand his fellow men.

4. He must have power of will and force of personal character.

These are the qualifications of a leader in any kind of movement, whether in war or peace; but we are speaking now more especially of Christian leadership and therefore we may venture to define more specifically what these qualifications mean as ideals to be aspired after by a bishop in the Church of God.

1. First of all, then, a leader must know and be able to declare the nature of the goal to which he desires to direct men. To St. Paul that goal was salvation in Jesus Christ, the development of moral and spiritual character by the power of the spirit after the type and model of the perfect man. All the money, all the lands, all the wealth of the world, nay, all the trained intelligence with the widest knowledge of scientific facts and methods, will not save a people unless they have moral and spiritual character. This is the lesson of the Bible everywhere, of the Old Testament, of the New Testament, and salvation in Christ is the attainment of moral and spiritual character. The Germans have taught us, if we did not realize it before, that intellectual efficiency without moral principle is the attribute of the Prince of Devils. It is character, not mere intelligence nor brute courage, that is going to win this war.

The first qualification of leadership is a sure conviction of whither the leader wishes to go and the goal; the end of Christian leadership is the attainment of moral and spiritual character in the power and spirit of Christ.

2. And the second qualification of leadership is a clear conviction of the truest and surest method and means by which this goal can be reached, and the Bible leaves us no room to doubt about that. St. Paul says to the young bishop whom he placed at Ephesus: "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." A bishop must "be apt to teach." "Hold fast the form of sound words." And to the bishop he left at Crete he says: "Speak thou the things that become sound doctrine. Speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority." That means preaching and teaching the faith that has been handed down to us.

But there is something more than preaching necessary. "By grace he are saved through faith." The apostle says: "Stir up the gift of grace that is in thee," for we are not only ambassadors of Christ, but "I could wish that but stewards of the mysteries of God." The purpose of Christian leadership is not merely that we should hear about Christ, but that we should be joined to Christ, not merely that we should know the good news of redemption, but that we should be partakers of the life of the redeemer; not merely that we should have aroused in us the feeling of need and the desire for help, but that we should actually receive within ourselves that power that overcomes evil and builds up character. So Christianity is more than the preaching of doctrine. It is the communication of a new life; it is a sacramental system. When St. Peter preached to the people on the day of Pentecost they were "pricked at the heart"—they were, as we say, converted, but St. Peter told them that was not enough. They must repent and be baptized. So some years afterwards when St. Peter went to Samaria and found those who had been baptized he completed their baptism by the laying on of hands. And from that day until this ministers of the Christian church have been not only preachers of the word, but ministers of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy communion. And from that day to this church has been what the prayer book calls "The Church Militant," an army in the field, trained and equipped to fight for truth and goodness, to overcome error and unrighteousness. And that implies organization and discipline. It implies authority and those who are commissioned to exercise it. It implies sacraments and those who are commissioned to administer them—obedience to orders and the reign of law. In our view of it, according to the teaching of scripture, the goal which the Christian leader must have clear before his mind is the attainment of Christian character; and the means by which that is to be achieved is obedience to the doctrine and the reverent use of the sacraments which Christ has ordained.

III. The third qualification for leadership is sympathy. A leader must know his people and understand them, go in and out among them, and sympathize with them in their weaknesses and strength, their ideals and hopes. The intelligent sympathy of a Christian leader is the greatest power that God can give a man for the work of helping and saving souls and the lack of it has often wrecked and ruined the career of men of great ability and genius. I remember reading the words of an eminent historian who said that the greatest social regeneration that was ever wrought since Christianity came into the world was accomplished by an humble-minded man whose chief distinction was his abounding sympathy as a sincere servant of Jesus Christ, and the man's name was St. Francis and he was born in a little Italian town called Assisi. St. Francis, in a wild and turbulent age, simply tried to live and act like Christ. He saw Christ on earth in man and beast and flower, and he was a poet whose poetry expressed itself not in verse, but in character." He knew not so much the doctrine as the person of Christ and spoke only of Christ's love. He opposed no man, he denounced nothing, he framed no system, he did not wish to found an order of monks. He had no interest in being imitated. He merely wished to live his life as he conceived it, wandering about without money or possessions so that he might be free from care. And yet that life of his changed the world in which he lived, fascinated and compelled the rudest men of a barbarous age, created art, revived literature, awakened learning, remade society. It was the power of sympathy in the name and faith of Jesus Christ.

IV. And the fourth qualification of leadership is that grace of God, call it what you please, force of will, sense of responsibility, resolute optimism which comes from the power of faith.

It was this that enabled St. Paul to fight the good fight and to keep the faith even unto death, though his own people misunderstood and persecuted him, though the Romans imprisoned him. "Woe to me," he said, "If I preach not the gospel and 'Israel

(Continued on Eighth Page.)

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