

Selected Sermons #14

The Festival Half of the Church Year by E. Schaller

Hebrews 10:19-25 Septuagesima

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Fellow members of the holy Christian Church on Earth –

It is not our custom, as at Christmas, to prepare for the Lenten season by decorating our homes and churches and setting lovely, colored lights in our windows. Thus we have the more time and opportunity to give thought to the really blessed and far more profitable task of preparing and beautifying our hearts and lives for the rapidly approaching days in which we will remember the suffering and death of

our Lord and Savior. In such preparation our Lord will find real pleasure, for he rejoices over those spiritual decorations which need not be taken down like tinsel when the season is over but which are to remain as a memorial to his sacrifice and death. How are we to decorate our hearts and lives?

Our Epistle invites us to examine the two ornaments that God himself considers a Christian's most glorious Lenten finery, suitable above all for the coming season and indeed for all the year –

Boldness and loyalty: the Christian's glorious Lenten finery.

I. Boldness – for oneself

II. Loyalty – to others

I. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, . . .

Have you ever held back from doing something which ought to be done because you dreaded it? Have you ever put off a necessary duty from day to day, because you were afraid? How common such an experience is! When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, the stricken father took his son on a three-day journey to the place where Isaac was to die, but he put off telling him until the last moment what the purpose really was. How he dreaded to reveal the truth to his son!

When your child receives a bad mark in behavior on his report card, the child may try to put off showing it to you as long as possible, although they know that sooner or later they must do so. What is the usual reasons for such hesitancy? They are fear, uncertainty, and a bad conscience. People are not sure of themselves; they are not sure of how the thing will turn out; they have no confidence; they feel guilty; they lack what it takes to see the thing through.

This very **dread** is in the heart of many people when they face the prospect of *entering the Holiest* – in other words, of appearing before the throne and face of God. Although they know that sooner or later it must be done, they keep putting it off, and the reason is that they do not know what the outcome will be – or that they know only too well what the result must be – namely, their own destruction. People hesitate to look up, face God once-and-for-all, and settle matters with him – because their conscience tells them that they have no chance with the holy God because of their sin. It is no use to tell them, “*Take your courage in your hands, have a meeting with God and have it out with him,*” because they have no courage to take with them. So we find them living in a world of make-believe; they pretend to themselves that they can avoid a meeting with God, until finally God calls them and they must come. Then they will appear before him with crying, fear, and trembling.

Let us not blame a man or woman for dreading such a meeting with God. The Scriptures admit and clearly state that *“it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31) Many prospects which human beings face turn out to be less formidable than they seemed, but not this one. To *enter the Holiest* means death for the sinner – eternal condemnation.

God would not want to deceive us into thinking anything else, even in regard to ourselves. When God invites us *to enter with boldness into the Holiest* to present ourselves before his throne, he is not suggesting that we put on a bold front and risk such a step with self-made courage. Will we say, *“Now I am simply going to step before God and have it out with him? I am going to pretend that there is nothing wrong between us.”* That would not be boldness, but foolhardiness, for God is not to be mocked.

But we do have *boldness*. We are told to take it and put it on, **to decorate and beautify our lives** with its richness because it is not of us but a boldness given us of God. *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter,”* says the Apostle. This is not a boldness to risk our heart’s blood in the hands of an angry God but the *boldness* that came by the blood of Jesus poured out for us. It is not a false courage but one which rests upon the sure foundation – the declaration that, however much we may have sinned, the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from our sin, and that facing God is not a thing to dread,

but something to undertake with eagerness and the joyful assurance of faith.

To fearful, hesitating hearts the Lord offers and urges this right to stop for all time the holding back, the hesitating, and the dreading to clothe ourselves in the *boldness* that is ours by gift. Why should we any longer be afraid? See, into our hands - as into the hands of the priests of old which held the bowl of blood of sacrifice - is given the blood of Jesus Christ, which beyond all gold and silver is the price sufficient for our ransom. We may hold this blood before us - the holy, precious God's blood, poured out of wounds large enough to hide our every sin.

Boldness certainly, for the old way - the terrible, rocky way to God, the way of the Law - is gone. We have before us a new way, broken and leveled by Jesus himself. He went before us; he stood before God with all our sins upon him; he faced God's wrath and by obedience and suffering won God's favor in spite of our sins for himself and for us. Hiding himself behind our flesh as behind a veil, he concealed his Godhead and went to settle matters with God. We could never have done it and survived; he did, and coming after him with his blood, we can too. Evil hearts, fearful, conscience-troubled hearts - yes, we have them, but they have been sprinkled with God's own blood, and they are clean. Even our *bodies* - if we are ashamed of them - even they have been *washed* through Baptism *with pure water*.

And if all else fails – our courage, yes, even our faith in all this **boldness** that we have been given – still, we have a *High Priest* in the office over *the House of God*, this Jesus. If conscience chokes us, if Satan shouts accusation – we may be silent, but Jesus will speak for us. It cannot fail, and thus we cannot lose!

Knowing this, brethren, now is the time to put on our finery. Others, who despise and reject Christ, may continue to live in their folly of putting off going to see God and making peace with him; for us, **now is the time to make use of the boldness offered us and enter the Holiest**. Let us say, “When you said, ‘Seek my face,’ my heart said to you, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek.’ ” (Psalms 27:8) Turn to Jesus, and through him to God! You will find mercy with him, and plenteous forgiveness.

II. And now we ask, “What must it do to a poor sinner when he has taken timid hold on the boldness held out to him, has come trustingly to the throne of God with the blood of Jesus, and has found there to his unspeakable joy that the greatest problem of his life – peace with God – is easily settled and forever resolved?

He will clothe himself in a fierce, glowing, loyalty toward his Lord and Savior and toward all those who share with him the boldness of redeemed Christians. It is quite useless to speak of loyalty to Christ to those who have not yet found peace at the throne. But to you the apostle says, “As you have found peace through Christ, boldness by his blood, so put on loyalty to match it.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

To have boldness without faith in Jesus is impossible, and it is just as unthinkable that anyone should have faith in Christ and not profess it willingly. Even a man like Nicodemus, though he hesitated a long time – once he found his way to peace with God through Christ, came out openly as a loyal confessor of Christ even in the most difficult hour. ***Boldness to enter the holiest brings boldness to confess***, to stand up for Christ and his truth. Having made peace with God, what is left to be afraid of except disloyalty, the unfaithfulness of one who has received a great gift and will not acknowledge it?

Loyalty is due unto Jesus. He has been faithful always to us; he has never failed us. In our darkest hours he has been there, and before God's throne he has been tireless in confessing us, even when we by sin denied him. Decorate yourself with loyalty toward him! Further, loyalty is due to others, to our brethren. Considering one another is the least we can do; a life of consideration is so sorely lacking. Our ugliness is our selfishness, especially in spiritual things. Where we could so well *consider one another in order to stir up love and good works* by example and by word, we oft-times let one another sway to the weakness of our flesh.

Loyalty is due to our Church, particularly in the assembling of ourselves together. The apostle confesses that even at his time I was the manner of some to forsake

the assembling. If for no other reason, loyalty demands faithful church-going. Aside from the benefits thus obtained, here it is that we are led in the way to the Holiest. To stay away is to be unfaithful, to disgrace every promise of Jesus. **Our time of loyalty is short; the time for Jesus' loyalty is eternal.** He will make good his love for us forever and ever; we need only stand true for a time – and this time is growing shorter.

Let us put on loyalty as the garment whereby we acknowledge that we belong to the Lamb of God, who has loved us and given us the inheritance of heaven; and we belong to one another in the loyal family of the saints! Abide with us, O Jesus, in our time remaining! Amen!

Before thee, God, who knowest all #318

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness #371

Praise to thee and adoration #401