

Meditation for the FOLK FAMILY REUNION, held at Rivers Bridge Memorial Park, S. C. Sunday, 26 June 1966.

INVOCATION: Let us pray:

O God our heavenly Father, Who settest the solitary in families, and didst send Thy only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, to be the Light and the Life of the Holy Family of Bethlehem and Nazareth, and to be the only Saviour of the whole family of mankind, we invoke the Presence of Thy Holy Spirit of Truth and Love among the members of this family here assembled, humbly beseeching Thy richest Blessings upon us, and upon all those members now absent from us, especially those whose absence is occasioned by sickness or other infirmity. For them we pray the Blessing of Thy healing grace and strength.

Let Thy fatherly hand gently guide and direct us in all our doings, Thy heavenly wisdom enlighten and inspire us, that whatsoever we think or say or do may be to Thy honor and glory, through the merits and mediation of the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pray with me THE LORD'S PRAYER:

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us this day and forevermore. Amen.

BE SEATED, PLEASE.

My devotional is designed to be strengthening, comforting and loving - I trust it will speak to us where we are - and to our needs as individual members of one family under God.

THE LESSON: St. James 3:17 - 4:2 and 4:7 - 8a.

SERMONETTE:

On June 20th, 1774 JACOB FOLK, the immigrant founder of this family, died in the Dutch Forks section of South Carolina, leaving his widow, ~~Elizabeth~~ ^{Catherine} (Epting) Folk, with seven children. Within a few years their eldest son, our great-uncle Henry Folk, was a soldier in the Revolutionary Army, and eventually gave his life in that bitter struggle for our political freedom and independence.

Jacob Folk's grandson, JOHN FRANCIS FOLK, from whom all of us here are descended (or connected by marriage), died in March of 1861, just as the Confederate War was getting under way, so we have no military service record for him, either.

But the families of both Jacob Folk and his grandson, John Francis, were deeply involved in fighting both these wars and the wars which have since followed hard upon each other - and this family is still fighting - all of us - thoroughly involved in the fierce warfare in Viet Nam -

and in the countless other demonstrations and incidents which are constantly breaking out all around the earth. Whether we like it or not (and I'm certain we don't!) WAR and FIGHTINGS plague us from generation to generation. This very place we are meeting is a memorial to the fierce fighting of 101 years ago.

"WHAT CAUSES WARS, AND WHAT CAUSES FIGHTINGS" among us? Is it not our PASSIONS that are at war in our members - our DESIRES, our WANTS? The Bible says the individual human heart is the initial battleground, the original site, the source of all our fighting, the origin of every war. We DESIRE and we do not have, we COVET and we cannot get, and so we FIGHT, we wage war. This is the way all human beings function - from the new-born baby (who fights by screaming) to the oldest great-grandparent - every one of us a prime example of that classic theological stumbling-block (for some, ^{as far as understanding what it means,} that is) of "ORIGINAL SIN". The ancient theologians were NOT guessing when they headed the list of the SEVEN DEADLY SINS with "PRIDE" - not a mere sin of the FLESH (such as lust or gluttony), but the far more corrupting sin, the sin of the SPIRIT. The Bible is so right!

We do not HAVE because we do not ASK! We don't ASK because we are TOO PROUD - our PRIDE won't let us.

And here I must say that many people are confused about PRIDE. There are probably even some members of our own family who do not join us here in our annual reunion because they are confused about family pride - even some of the clergy in their sermons in years passed have berated us because they misunderstand the meaning of pride. *But there's a very real difference between pride and gratitude.*

SINFUL PRIDE is a haughty spirit, a stiff neck, a belittling of others, a lack of sympathy for others, a spirit of strife, an estrangement from God, a withholding of good works and kind words, a disdain for law and order, a refusal to honor God and His works. THE BOOK OF PROVERBS abounds

with metaphors and similes and colorful examples of PRIDE - I commend the Book of Proverbs to you for its great wealth of practical wisdom. Put it on your reading list.

Our gathering here each year to renew the tender ties of family, to honor the memory of our forebears, to rejoice in one another's triumphs and successes, to weep with those who weep, to share a little of our time and love and laughter with others of our own family, to break bread together, to THANK our CREATOR-REDEEMER-SUSTAINER GOD for His abundant mercies - all this is by way of KEEPING God's Commandments. / ^{This is ~~an~~ exercise in gratitude.} Not one whit of it is described anywhere in the Bible as any exercise in sinful pride.

As a family we have an honorable and an upright heritage, something that belongs to us not so much ^{just} to PRESERVE as to LIVE FROM, a heritage which should be so presented to our younger members, our boys and girls, that it will determine concretely where they shall BEGIN their vocational tasks. Our family heritage saves us from unworthy goals, from low standards, from rude and mean ambitions. We love all the members of our family and EXPECT THE BEST from them - in DEVOTION to God and country, in scholarship, in thought and inventiveness, in every kind of work, in every performance. We EXPECT our family to show up well in every undertaking, to be conspicuous for doing the RIGHT thing. We have no intention of lowering our standards in order to defend any member of the family who departs from the way of righteousness - that would be an example of sinful pride.

Yes, we have a noble and an ancient heritage - we have a present living family reality. But the world is STILL NOT AT PEACE - there are still wars and fighting. We do not HAVE because we do not ASK! And we do not ASK because we are too proud - our PRIDE won't let us. ^{We are} like all other people in this - the Bible describes us accurately.

We are not able to break the vicious cycle, the deadlock! This is mankind's old characteristic dilemma; this is our lostness; this is our NEED for SOMEONE outside ourselves (someone with POWER) to come to us WHERE WE ARE, to enter completely into our dilemma and SAVE us.

Thanks be to God, this is precisely what God the Son, Christ Jesus, in His boundless LOVE for us HAS DONE and IS DOING! In His once-for-all-time, PERFECT SELF-SACRIFICE on Calvary's Cross, Jesus has reconciled mankind to God our Creator; Jesus WON A BATTLE in a single human heart which is the EARNEST, the GUARANTEE, the ASSURANCE, that ultimately the FIGHTING in EVERY human breast will be victoriously ended - NOT by our individual human strength, not by our individually trying harder and harder to "go it alone", but by GOD'S POWER and MIGHT, the POWER which raised JESUS VICTOR over the grave on the first Easter Day, the POWER that truly trumpeted the eventual defeat of all human PRIDE. The tide of evil in the hearts of mankind surged to its high-water-mark, not at Waterloo, not in World War I or World War II, but long before, in the devil's attempt to conquer the world at that moment when he led us in nailing God to the Cross on Good Friday. How FULL OF PRIDE evil is!

But how futile, how sterile PRIDE is in the Kingdom of Christ! For there it is that FAITH, HOPE and LOVE reign triumphant!

Of course, evil is going to continue winning victories here in this world. We have lost 2/3 of the people of the world to communist slavery; we have lost Cuba here in our own hemisphere; we may possibly lose Viet Nam, possibly more. But we can still REJOICE - yes, JOY and JOY again - because God's VICTORY is sure.

WE Christians SHARE in God's ultimate victory NOW; His Power

enables to LIVE in the spirit of His ultimate Victory. How? By ASKING in order that we may receive, by BEING GRAFTED into the Body of which the Victor is Head in Holy Baptism, by FEEDING AND NOURISHING His Holy Spirit (Who is tabernacled ^{here} within us) on the Spiritual Food and Drink of the most Precious Body and Blood of the Victor, by CONTINUING steadfastly in His WAY despite the darts and snares of the enemy who may indeed KILL OUR BODIES here in this world BUT CANNOT HURT OUR SOULS nor their RESURRECTION DAY BODIES which God will provide.

Someone has said that the keynote of the New Testament is JOY;
 J - O - Y : Jesus, others, yourself - a winning combination. JOY!

How comforting, how strengthening, to hear again the Word of our Blessed Lord Jesus:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and GREATER works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. WHATEVER YOU ASK IN MY NAME, I WILL DO IT, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ASK ANYTHING IN MY NAME, I WILL DO IT."

Ask, that you may receive, that your JOY may be FULL!