

10th Sunday of Luke 2006: Prophet Obadiah

A sermon by Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
Delivered on December 10, 2006

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Christ is among us

Last week we began a series on the Prophets in preparation for the upcoming feast of the Lord's Nativity, for they prepared the world for His advent in the flesh. We began by looking at the prophet Obadiah, whose name means "servant of God," first in the character of Obadiah the steward of King Ahab and hesitant disciple of the great Prophet Elijah. Today we look at the actual Prophecy of Obadiah, the smallest of the books of the Old Testament, as the beginning of our study of the prophets. Even though it is the shortest of prophecies, being limited to what amounts to one chapter, it is by no means without depth spanning the entirety of the story of our salvation. In this it helps us prepare our own souls by teaching us God's will for us, especially in regards to our families.

The Prophecy of Obadiah deals with destruction of Edomites, a nation to the south and east of Israel in what is modern day Jordan. The Edomites were closely related racially to the Hebrews, being linked to them as the offspring of Esau, the older brother of Jacob, who himself was called Israel, forefather of the twelve tribes. Just as the relationship between Jacob and Esau was strained, full of conflict and jealousy, so too the relationship between neighboring lands was difficult. Thus, the whole relationship is a symbolism of the whole struggle of nations, the struggle of man, and the struggle of brother against brother. This is a universal theme. It prepares us for the theme of Christmas and the Nativity in the unity of God and Man, Jew and gentile, peace on earth. But there is also an aspect of judgment. As we see in the gospel, what happens when we seek our own well-being and neglect God and our neighbor, we bring judgment on

ourselves. Judgment is rarely a theme that we connect with Christmas, yet if we look closely, it is inseparable. Christ's birth heralds the coming of God's Kingdom, and the meting out of divine justice.

In the prophecy of Obadiah, Edom is judged most harshly not because it attacked its neighbor, not because it waged war, but simply because it refused to help Israel in its time of need. It is written:

¹⁰ “For violence against your brother Jacob,
Shame shall cover you,
And you shall be cut off forever.
¹¹ In the day that you stood on the other side—
In the day that strangers carried captive his forces,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
Even you were as one of them.
¹² But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother
In the day of his captivity;
Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah
In the day of their destruction;
Nor should you have spoken proudly
In the day of distress.

Edom's great crime was that it sat back and did nothing to assist a people whom should have been close to them, but rejoiced in the afflictions of their neighbor and were willing accomplices to the destruction of Jerusalem. They participated in the looting of the land, they helped prevent the Judeans from escaping, by delivering up those they could find.

We may very well wonder at what this has to do with us today, why this story and this judgment was preserved for us as Holy Scripture. If we remember that this story is emblematic of all our human relationships, in particular those with our own family members and our neighbors, we shall begin to see their application. How many of us have not sat back and secretly felt smug and glad when a family member has not prospered. How many of us have participated in gossip, speaking behind their back of their misfortune, offering criticism but nothing

constructive. How many times have we rolled our eyes at our brother or sister and thought ourselves so much smarter, or better, wiser, or more righteous, if not openly “spoken proudly in the day of distress”. Have we not all at some point in our life played the part of Edom, and helped delivered up to distress one who we should have been helping?

God’s judgment on us will be the same as it was on Edom:

15 “For the day of the LORD upon all the nations *is* near;
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.
16 For as you drank on my holy mountain,
So shall all the nations drink continually;
Yes, they shall drink, and swallow,
And they shall be as though they had never been.

The Lord taught us do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It is also true that as we do unto others *will be done* unto us! “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Matt. 7:2) The image of the nations drinking on the holy mountain, is powerful for us. Just as the Edomites reveled in the suffering of their neighbor, so too they would be drowned by it. This is what happens to us when we drink up the suffering of others. It drowns out our very humanity, and we are left as empty and meaningless and worthless as if we had never been.

The final result of all our sin will be our own condemnation. God will not be mocked. He has sworn to do justice:

17 “But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
18 The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
And the house of Joseph a flame;
But the house of Esau *shall be* stubble;
They shall kindle them and devour them,
And no survivor shall *remain* of the house of Esau,”
For the LORD has spoken...
21 Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion

To judge the mountains of Esau,
And the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

Thus prophecy to a certain extent has been fulfilled. Today in the world we do not find an identifiable people known as the Edomites. Herod the king at the time of the birth of Christ was one of the very last. Because of his wickedness and the wickedness of his offspring they eventually died out because of their own machinations—the Romans were far too practical to put up with their treacherous politics. And indeed, on Mount Zion there has been deliverance and holiness for Christ has come to live and die and live again, to sanctify His new and Holy Temple, as we read in today's epistle:

¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us seek to emulate Emmanuel and not Edom. Let us break down the walls of strife, neglect, jealousy, pride, resentment, and all enmity that separates us from our neighbors, our family members, even our fellow Christians, especially in this holiday season. It is this time of year that we often come face to face with friends and family from whom we have become estranged. The rest of the year we do not have as much opportunity or perhaps even pressure to face our failing relationships, but at the holidays they stand out as dark shadows dimming the light of our celebrations. Let us make haste to make peace with one another, recognizing our call to all be members of the household of God. In this way, we may all

rejoice in the true meaning of the Nativity: “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” Amen.

¹The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom
(We have heard a report from the LORD,
And a messenger has been sent among the nations, *saying*,
“Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle”):

² “Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
You shall be greatly despised.

³ The pride of your heart has deceived you,
You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
Whose habitation is high;
You who say in your heart,
“Who will bring me down to the ground?”

⁴ Though you ascend *as* high as the eagle,
And though you set your nest among the stars,
From there I will bring you down,” says the LORD.

⁵ “If thieves had come to you,
If robbers by night—
Oh, how you will be cut off!—
Would they not have stolen till they had enough?
If grape-gatherers had come to you,
Would they not have left *some* gleanings?

⁶ **“Oh, how Esau shall be searched out!
How his hidden treasures shall be sought after!**

⁷ All the men in your confederacy
Shall force you to the border;
The men at peace with you
Shall deceive you *and* prevail against you.
Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you.
No one is aware of it.

⁸ “Will I not in that day,” says the LORD,
“Even destroy the wise *men* from Edom,
And understanding from the mountains of Esau?
⁹ Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed,
To the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau
May be cut off by slaughter.

¹⁰ **“For violence against your brother Jacob,
Shame shall cover you,
And you shall be cut off forever.**

¹¹ In the day that you stood on the other side—
In the day that strangers carried captive his forces,

When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
Even you *were* as one of them.

12 **But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother
In the day of his captivity;
Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah
In the day of their destruction;
Nor should you have spoken proudly
In the day of distress.**

13 You should not have entered the gate of My people
In the day of their calamity.
Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction
In the day of their calamity,
Nor laid *hands* on their substance
In the day of their calamity.

14 You should not have stood at the crossroads
To cut off those among them who escaped;
Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained
In the day of distress.

15 **“For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near;
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.**

16 For as you drank on my holy mountain,
So shall all the nations drink continually;
Yes, they shall drink, and swallow,
And they shall be as though they had never been.

17 **“But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.**

18 **The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
And the house of Joseph a flame;
But the house of Esau *shall be* stubble;
They shall kindle them and devour them,
And no survivor shall *remain* of the house of Esau,”
For the LORD has spoken.**

19 The South shall possess the mountains of Esau,
And the Lowland shall possess Philistia.
They shall possess the fields of Ephraim
And the fields of Samaria.
Benjamin *shall possess* Gilead.

20 And the captives of this host of the children of Israel
Shall possess the land of the Canaanites
As far as Zarephath.
The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
Shall possess the cities of the South.

21 **Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion**

**To judge the mountains of Esau,
And the kingdom shall be the LORD's.**