

Sermon: 2019/12/11 (The Feast of Daniel Stylite, Year A) - Amos 8:1-14; Psalm 60; Revelation 1:17-2:7; & Matthew 23:1-12_BTR

Today is the feast day of Saint Daniel *the Stylite*.

We're not, then, thinking of the *original* Daniel - the prophet in Persia, but a *much* later namesake.

This "later" Daniel lived in the fifth century *AD* as the Roman Empire - one of Jesus' *formidable* enemies in the New Testament period - was now crumbling and collapsing.

And he lived in what today would be Iraq.

A "stylite" - yes, there was more than one - was a Christian... eccentric who, in an endeavour to live a pure, *God*-pleasing life, erected a tall, thick, stone pillar in a remote place, climbed to the top, and lived there 'til they died.

Daniel managed it for *thirty-three* years.

It was a lonely, bleak, difficult existence:

one had to train oneself to continually balance, even when asleep, in all weathers, so as not to fall to their death.

And we might laugh at such a person.

– for doing something so odd.

And *certainly* we aren't *required* to do the same (ourselves),

but the point (of the thing) was to avoid the *undeniable* temptations of ordinary living.

And though we needn't necessarily adopt such an extreme ourselves, there remains the question as to why we would make *any* effort of self-control and discipline?

(As disciples, that is.)

Well, in our reading from *Revelation* this evening, Saint John, who has been taken on an out-of-body tour of Heaven by an angel, encounters Jesus Christ in His true, *glorious* form.

That is to say - let us be precise - that John describes in the passage meeting *again* his old friend, that young rabbi he knew from Galilee; *but*, having beaten death on Easter and ascended to be once more at His father's side, that "young rabbi," Jesus, no longer has any use for the former masquerade - the necessary deception, if you like, of appearing *merely* as a human man.

Now, in His "native habitat," Jesus appears as He really is: almost beyond description.

He is *dazzling* gold and white, with eyes of fire;

His skin looks no longer as ours - as flesh - but seems like molten metal.

And so, we see, John "falls" 'at His feet as dead.'

In other words, John is *terrified*.

He is "terrified" not because that is the effect Jesus, the "Prince of Peace," was looking to have on the Apostle.

Oh no!

Rather, seeing Him now as fully God - *magnificently* holy, *fearsomely* just, intolerant of *all* imperfection, John responds appropriately.

He faints.

He swoons.

He cowers.

And He does these things because of the contrast - *the gulf* - that, in that incredible moment, becomes clear in their respective natures.

Which reminds me of a moment in C. S. Lewis' novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Are you familiar with this adventure?

The tales of "Narnia?"

Well, in it the four main characters - four children - have found themselves in a magical world of talking animals; and they're taken in by the very hospitable and kind Mr and Mrs Beaver.

Over dinner in their dam, the six of them get to talking about the true ruler of that fantastical place, "Aslan." A rather obvious symbol for Christ in the book.

It goes like this: I quote -

- "Aslan a man?" said Mr Beaver sternly. "*Certainly* not. ... Aslan is a lion - *the Lion, the great Lion.*"
- "Ooh!" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."
- "That you will, dearie, and make no mistake," said Mrs Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most of else just [plain] silly."
- "Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy [confused].
- "Safe?" [exclaimed] Mr Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. [He's a lion!] But he's *good*. [And h]e's the King....""

Let's take a moment to reflect.