"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

"And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. "And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

- Isaiah xi,6-9

Isaiah xi,1-10

Psalm 51

New Book of Worship, Psalm 51, pp.58, 59

Matthew xviii,1-11

In the beginning, the time of the Most Ancient Church, people of our earth lived together in innocence and peace. This was the childhood of the human race. As individuals we have our childhood, in which we are free from cares and anxieties and the future is full of promise.

As we grow up and come to maturity and look back on those days, we see their contrast with the present and we look forward to a future in which innocence will again be restored and people will live together in peace without anxiety for the future. In world affairs this is the idea of the millenium, with which our text is commonly associated.

The state of human life prevailing at present is one of unrest. Since the first great war which ended about thirty years ago the world has not been at peace. A sort of armed truce has prevailed, interrupted by the second world war. Today the condition continues to be that of an armistice.

We judge ourselves by comparison. We look back upon the past and, if life for us is difficult and the future uncertain, we are prone to think of the "good old days." Yet we always have hope for the future. It is good to look back upon the past. History can teach us much - both our own individual history and the history of mankind as a whole. It is good also to look forward to the future, to believe in the Divine Providence that is over all things, and to believe that the future is full of promise.

But we cannot live either in the past or in the future. The Scriptures indeed speak of a time when peace shall be universal, but this does not mean that the Scriptures hold a message only for the future. Much of the impractical religious life of today results from thinking in future rather than in present terms. Peace will come as a development or growth, not as a sudden act of God. All the
prophecies have a present meaning and application. Our hope for the future depends upon our work in the present. This is true of the world at large and of our individual lives. And it is only by the regeneration of the individual that the welfare of the world at large can be improved and advanced.

The prophecy in our text has its message for the present and for the individual soul. We seek peace for ourselves. It cannot be attained at once, but only as evils and falsities in ourselves are fought against and overcome. The ferocious and predatory animals are types of the fierce passions of our hereditary nature, and the gentle and useful animals of the affections that we acquire from the Lord by regeneration. The taming of the ferocious and destructive animals so that they do not injure the gentle and innocent animals on which they are accustomed to prey represents bringing our selfish lusts and desires under the dominion of our higher affections so that they will have no power to do injury to the good and truth in ourselves or in others.

Each animal has its particular symbolism. The wolf is distinguished by its fierceness, the leopard by its treacherousness, and the lion by its power. In the will evil is fierce, in the intellect it is treacherous, in the conduct it is powerful. In the Scriptures evil is likened to a ravenous wolf seeking only to devour. And evil seeks to accomplish its purposes through a keen but prevented intellect which, like the leopard, moves with stealth to further its ends. And evil as it breaks out in outward act manifests itself in its power. Evils are in everyone by inheritance, and when practiced they become established. The text applies to every individual.

Both the Old Testament and the New tell us that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and that out of it proceed evils of every kind. All the evils that have existed or that do exist in the world exist only because they are in the human heart. It is there that the wolf, the leopard, and the lion have their lurking places. And there, too, are the asp with its poison, and the cockatrice’s egg that may become a fiery flying serpent. They are in the minds even of the young as hereditary inclinations which, if not prevented by reformation and regeneration, will grow in strength and break forth in deeds.

If it were not for the Lord, who in His Divine providence cares for children, protects, and defends them, every child would grow up to be more fierce than any beast. In infancy, into their states of innocence, there inflows from the Lord an affection for parents and associates, the first implanting of unselfish love. Then in childhood there is implanted the affection for knowledge, the desire to learn, and trust in the wisdom of parents. And in the period of youth the attraction of young people to each other, friendships formed without thought of social status or race, furthers the possibility of spiritual development. These are favorable circumstances provided by the Lord for the purpose of enabling the individual to
begin the process of reformation and regeneration. These innocent and pure affections are the lamb, the kid, and the fatling, with which the wolf, the leopard, and the lion are to lie down. For these destructive evils inherent in our nature are held by the Lord in comparative quiescence by the innocence that is implanted in infancy, childhood, and youth. It is said of the wolf, the leopard, and the lion that a little child shall lead them. It is the innocence represented by the little child that controls the selfish passions and makes them obedient.

Our text continues, "The cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox." In the first part we have young animals; here we have grown-up ones, and these latter animals are of the herd. They represent the natural affections - the affections of the natural mind. Here it is said that they will feed together. In the development of the mind feeding is emblematic of instruction, for the mind is nourished by knowledge as the body is by food. The natural affections are nourished by truths from the letter of the Lord. Sometimes we do good from a desire for self-glory, and many times there is something of self-interest in the good things we do. Our natural heredity is active along with our acquired affection for good, and the power of these affections is made use of in the control of deeper evils. This is what is meant by the lion eating straw like the ox.

It is said of these animals that a little child shall lead them. Now two other children are mentioned, "And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den." The asp and the cockatrice, species of serpents, are the deep evils of our sensual nature, and particularly the subtle reasoning and keen perception which is limited to the senses and which in the evil believes only what it sees and feels. To be able to overcome this kind of reasoning in ourselves and to be able to protect ourselves against it in others, it is necessary to have the kind of wisdom that is grounded in the innocence of infancy which the sucking child represents and also in the innocence of youth represented by the weaned child. The Lord commanded his disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, and He sent them forth as sheep among wolves. The disciples were to protect themselves against wicked men and to do them good by the exercise of a prudence on a level with their own. Innocence without wisdom is no match for wisdom without innocence. Many have been enticed from the paths of right by the allurements and subtle reasoning of the serpent. Such allurements are the charm of the serpent and such reasonings the cruel venom of asps.

Our strength is not from ourselves but from the Lord. That is why children are mentioned here. The less we rely upon ourselves, upon our own strength and wisdom - the more we become as little children - the nearer we are to the kingdom of heaven and the more we come under the protection of the Lord.

And there is another reason why the fierce and savage animals are mentioned in our text. However much our evils may be subdued and held under control, their nature never changes. The wolf may dwell with the lamb and the leopard may lie down with the kid, but they are the wolf and the leopard still. Whatever state of regeneration we may attain, we hold our evils in check only through the power of the Lord received as we learn and do His will. (Repeat full text) Amen