

DEARLY BELOVED: CHRIST IS AMONG US!

THERE IS AN ANCIENT STORY TOLD OF A WOMAN WHO FOUND A JAR WHICH HAD BEEN FULL OF CHOICE OLD WINE AND WHICH STILL RETAINED ITS DELICIOUS FRAGRANCE. SHE OPENED THE JAR AND FOUND IT EMPTY. BUT SEVERAL TIMES SHE PLACED IT TO HER NOSE, AND DRAWING IT BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS SAID, "O MOST DELICIOUS! HOW DELIGHTFUL THIS WINE MUST HAVE BEEN WHEN IT LEAVES BEHIND EVEN IN THE JAR SO SWEET A PERFUME!" THE LESSON THE STORY TEACHES IS THAT SOMETHING THAT IS TRULY BEAUTIFUL SUCH AS A GOOD DEED, LIVES ON EVEN LONG AFTER IT WAS DONE.

JESUS ASSURES US THAT WHAT LASTS IN THIS LIFE IS THE WORSHIP WE GIVE GOD, THE GOOD WE DO FOR ONE ANOTHER. HE TELLS US TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES, AND DO GOOD, AND LEND, EXPECTING NOTHING IN RETURN; AND OUR REWARD WILL BE GREAT, AND YOU WILL BE CHILDREN OF THE MOST HIGH; FOR HE IS KIND TO THE UNGRATEFUL AND THE SELFISH. (LUKE 6:35)

TODAY JESUS TELLS US OF A RICH MAN WHO DID NOT CONCERN HIMSELF WITH DOING GOOD, WITH LIVING CLOSE TO GOD AND NEIGHBOR. RATHER THE MAN WAS CLOSEST TO HIS POSSESSIONS: HIS HARVEST, HIS FOOD, HIS ENTERTAINMENT, HIS RICHES. JESUS REMARKS ON THE MAN'S FOOLISHNESS. ANYTHING THAT WE CAN LAY OUR HANDS ON: GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS GEMS, CARS, HOUSES, ALL OF THEM WILL PASS AWAY. THEY WILL MEAN NOTHING TO US IN OUR JOURNEY THROUGH DEATH.

JESUS MAKES CRYSTAL CLEAR THAT THE MERCY WE SHOW TO OTHERS, THE FOOD WE GIVE TO THE HUNGRY, THE CLOTHING TO THOSE WITHOUT, THE DRINK WE GIVE TO THE THIRSTY, THE VISITS WE PAY TO THOSE WHO ARE SICK OR IMPRISONED, THESE DEEDS LIVE ON AND THOSE GOOD DEEDS WILL ANSWER FOR US WHEN JESUS COMES AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

WE ARE NOW IN THE FAST TO PREPARE US FOR THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR, CHRIST JESUS. EVERY FASTING SEASON WE ARE CALLED UPON TO PRAY MORE, TO FAST MORE AND TO GIVE ALMS. THE GIVING OF ALMS PREPARES FOR US A PLACE IN THE HEAVENLY MANSIONS BECAUSE THE GOOD THAT WE DO, THE VIRTUES THAT WE LIVE, OUTLAST EVEN DEATH. SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM SPOKE ABOUT WHAT WE CARRY WITH US WHEN WE LEAVE THIS WORLD WHEN HE SAID, "WHAT BENEFIT WILL COME TO YOU FROM PEARLS ON THE DAY OF YOUR DEATH?...FOR WHAT WORD OF DEFENSE WILL YOU BE ABLE TO SPEAK WHEN THE MASTER SHALL ACCUSE YOU IN THE MATTER OF THESE PEARLS, AND WHEN HE SHALL LEAD FORWARD THE POOR WHO HAVE PERISHED FROM HUNGER? BUT EVEN IF WE SHOULD ENJOY FOOD AND CLOTHING, MONEY AND PROPERTY DAY IN AND DAY OUT, WE SHALL BE SEPARATED FROM THEM UTTERLY BY DEATH. VIRTUE, HOWEVER, DOES NOT CHANGE OR ALTER. IT IS COMPLETELY SECURE, AND IT BOTH MAKES US MORE SECURE IN THIS WORLD AND GOES ALONG WITH US TO THE NEXT. DO YOU WISH TO POSSESS PRECIOUS STONES AND NEVER TO LAY ASIDE THIS WEALTH? THEN STRIP OFF YOUR ADORNMENT AND PUT IT INTO CHRIST'S HANDS THROUGH THE HANDS OF HIS POOR. CHRIST WILL GUARD ALL OUR RICHES FOR US AGAINST THE DAY WHEN HE WILL RAISE UP OUR BODIES WITH GREAT GLORY. OUR PRESENT WEALTH AND ADORNMENT ARE REALLY PALTRY AND RIDICULOUS (SO WHEN HE RAISES UP OUR BODIES WITH GREAT GLORY) HE WILL PUT ON US A BETTER WEALTH AND RICHER ADORNMENT."—ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, BAPTISMAL INSTRUCTIONS

THE LIFE OF ST. LAWRENCE WHO WAS MARTYRED FOR CHRIST IN THE YEAR 258 IN ROME RE-ITERATES OUR LORD'S COMMAND THAT WE SHARE OUR TREASURE ON EARTH THAT WE MAY FIND TREASURE IN HEAVEN. THE PAGAN EMPEROR BROUGHT LAWRENCE, A DEACON, AND COMMANDED THAT HE PRODUCE THE HIDDEN TREASURE OF THE CHURCH. ST. LAWRENCE ANSWERED: "GIVE ME A PERIOD OF THREE DAYS, AND I SHALL SHOW YOU THIS TREASURE." DURING THIS TIME THE SAINT GATHERED UP A CROWD OF THE POOR AND THE SICK, WHO ATE ONLY BECAUSE OF THE CHARITY OF THE CHURCH, AND BRINGING THEM HE EXPLAINED: "HERE ARE THE VESSELS IN WHICH IS CONTAINED THE TREASURE. AND EVERYONE, WHO PUTS THEIR TREASURE IN THESE VESSELS, WILL RECEIVE THEM IN ABUNDANCE IN THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM."