

DEARLY BELOVED: CHRIST IS AMONG US!

WHILE WE MAKE OUR WAY THROUGH OUR PECULIAR AUTUMN WEATHER APPROACHING WINTER, AT THE SAME TIME WE ARE MAKING OUR WAY THROUGH THE CHURCH'S CALENDAR. WE ARE AT THE MIDPOINT OF THE CHRISTMAS FAST, DAY TWENTY OF FORTY DAYS OF INCREASED FASTING, ALMSGIVING AND PRAYER. THESE THREE ACTS PREPARE US IN BODY AND SPIRIT FOR THE COMING OF THE SAVIOR, THE SON OF GOD WHO TOOK FLESH FROM THE VIRGIN AND WAS BORN AS AN INFANT IN A CAVE OF BETHLEHEM FOR OUR SALVATION.

THE FEAST OF THE GREATMARTYR BARBARA TODAY CALLS FOR THIS EPISTLE READING WHERE WE HAVE HEARD THE WORDS OF SAINT PAUL, "BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, BORN OF A WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW, TO REDEEM THOSE WHO WERE UNDER THE LAW, THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION AS SONS." (GALATIANS 4:4-5) OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN SENT HIS ONLY SON TO TAKE UP OUR HUMAN NATURE FROM THE VIRGIN BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT WE MIGHT BECOME JOINED TO HIM BY GRACE. "FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE PUT ON CHRIST. FOR YOU ARE ALL SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS." (GALATIANS 3:27, 26) EACH OF US BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE COME INTO SPIRITUAL DAUGHTERSHIP AND SONSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER. WE ARE A NEW CREATION (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17), CHILDREN NOT ONLY OF OUR EARTHLY PARENTS BUT CHILDREN OF GOD THE FATHER HIMSELF IN CHRIST JESUS AND THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD. WE ARE CALLED, THEN, TO LIVE AS GOD'S CHILDREN. LOVING HIM. OFFERING HIM DUE WORSHIP AND PRAISE. OBEYING HIS WILL FOR US RATHER THAN OUR SELFISH INCLINATIONS. OVERCOMING EVIL NOT BY MORE EVIL BUT BY DOING GOOD. (ROMANS 12:21)

THIS IS SOMETHING THAT THE SON OF GOD SHOWED US IN HIS OWN LIFE UPON THE EARTH. IN JESUS' HEALING OF THE WOMAN WHO WAS SO BENT OVER THAT SHE COULD NO LONGER LOOK UP AT ANYONE, WE SEE HIS GOODNESS. JESUS SHOWS HIS MERCY TOWARDS AND LOVE FOR THE WOMAN BY HEALING HER IMMEDIATELY. AND FOR HIS GOOD WORK, THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE CONDEMNED JESUS, AS THOUGH JESUS WAS NOT KEEPING THE SABBATH HOLY BECAUSE HE WORKED A MIRACLE. IN A WAY, JESUS' HEALING OF THE INFIRM WOMAN IS A SYMBOL OF WHY HE CAME INTO THE WORLD, TAKING ON OUR HUMAN NATURE, BEING BORN, LIVING AMONG US. THE HUMANITY THAT GOD CREATED, ALL THE PEOPLE BORN INTO THE WORLD, WE COULD NOT SAVE OURSELVES FROM OUR CAPTIVITY TO SIN, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL. LIKE THE WOMAN WE HAD NO WAY TO RAISE OURSELVES UP. SO THE SON OF GOD BECOMES INCARNATE FOR US, HE WHO IS SPIRIT IS BORN IN THE FLESH AS A HUMAN. HE LIVES A HUMAN LIFE AS ANY OF US LIVE, EXPERIENCING SUFFERING AND JOY, HUNGER AND THIRST, LIFE AND THE DREAD OF DEATH AND FINALLY, YES, EVEN DEATH ITSELF. CHRIST WAS BORN SO THAT HE MAY DIE FOR US, TO REDEEM US, TO HEAL OUR HUMANITY, AND TO REVEAL TO US THAT OUR LIFE TO BE LIVED TO THE FULLEST MEANS WORSHIPPING THE HOLY TRINITY OF FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT, OF PRAYER AND FASTING AND ALMSGIVING, OF SHOWING MERCY TO THOSE WHO LOVE US AND THOSE WHO HATE US, RETURNING A CURSE WITH A BLESSING AND BEING PERSONS WHO BRING PEACE WHEN WE ENTER A ROOM, NOT WHEN WE LEAVE IT.

LET US KEEP AT OUR PREPARATION FOR THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR BY LIVING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. CONFESSING OUR SINS, RECEIVING GOD'S FORGIVENESS, SHARING OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS, PRAYING FOR ALL, THOSE WHO LOVE US AND THOSE WHO HATE US, FASTING TO TAME OUR FLESHLY DESIRES SO THAT WE MAY BE OPEN TO HEAR GOD'S WORD IN OUR LIVES AND BEAR THE FRUIT OF CARRYING CHRIST WITHIN US IN IMITATION OF SHE WHO CARRIED HIM WHO CARRIES ALL, THE SON OF GOD, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.