

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (13:10-17; Gal.4:22-27)

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit +

Abraham's son Ishmael was born of the bondwoman, the slave woman, Hagar. This, says Paul, is symbolic (*allegoreo* in the Greek) of the Covenant of Sinai, the Law of Moses, the Torah. It signifies being born according to the flesh and being bound to the Law and the temple worship at Jerusalem.

But to be born of the freewoman, as Isaac was born of Abraham's wife Sarah, corresponds to being born according of the covenant and promise that God made with Abraham; that he would be the fathers of many nations and that through him all the nations/people would be blessed. This, says Paul, is symbolic of the Jerusalem of above; being free from the law and of the flesh, but free to God, making us heirs to the promise of Abraham.

What is the point? That these two types of birth, one of the flesh and one of the promise, were pointing to something greater, namely that the Law of Moses cannot save, cannot produce righteousness, and is not righteousness. Instead, the Law kept Israel in bondage, as a tutor, until the fulfillment of promise of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, namely that Jesus Christ should come; and in coming making those who are united to Him, baptized into and clothed with Him, to share in His Sonship, making them fellow heirs.

That is what is meant by "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry out, you who are not in travail: For many are the children of the desolate, much more than of her who has a husband." The the barren Church of the Gentiles has been grafted as a young olive shoot upon the root and stock of righteous Abraham.

And this was done with Christ God, who is beyond and outside of time and creation, who entered into time and lowered Himself into creation.<sup>i</sup> This is the whole point of Advent; that God entered into human history as a man.<sup>ii</sup> It is no coincidence that on Sundays during Advent we read primarily from the Gospel of Luke, as Luke is the new history. In the Old Testament you have the books of the Torah, history, apocalypse, and wisdom. Mathew is the new Torah, Mark is the new apocalypse, John is the new wisdom, and Luke the new history.<sup>iii</sup>

And what do we find in Luke? God in history, in time, as the Son of Man, healing a woman whom Satan bound for 10 and eight years. And He does so with the touch of His hand and the words of His mouth. What does this teach us? That humanity, that time, that history and this world can be, and

are, sanctified; that we have made anew to share in the Divine life, because Divinity is now come as a new born babe. And the lesson teaches us that Christ, who can heal the body, can certainly heal the soul in this life and in this time.

But such healing and sanctification does not happen in isolation. It happens in the Church, where we are given the fullness of the Gospel. Just as the Galatians were told not to re-introduce the keeping of the Law of Moses into their being governed by the Holy Spirit, so too are we not to compromise and re-introduce, philosophies, or theologies of other Christian sects into our being governed by the Spirit, as if the Gospel, as if the Church, were incomplete.

In the Church we acquire the Holy Spirit. Can we acquire the Holy Spirit and receive salvation apart from the Body of Christ? Can we bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit apart from the faith in which we receive the Holy Spirit? We need to be governed by and bear the fruits of Holy Spirit.

Think of it like this: Fruit comes from a tree or vine of some sort, but fruit is the culmination of a long process that begins with a seed in fertile ground. What happens if you add foreign soil to the mix or if you take some of the soil away? It upsets the growth. Next you need proper sunlight and moisture, careful pruning, the weathering of storms and drought, and the overcoming of disease and pests. Only then does a tree bear abundant and healthy fruit. That is the Orthodoxy way.

The fruits of the Spirit are not apples or oranges, figs or watermelon, but are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, an upright character, faith, meekness and self-control. These fruits of the heart are born from the fertile soil of the Gospel. We as a Church must not weaver at the long process. We as a Church must have a heart feed with the nutrients of obedience, humility and repentance, which is orienting our lives toward God. We must feed ourselves with the teachings of Christ, the lives of the saints, cut off the dead weight of sin, weather those things that come against us, and not succumb when spiritually attacked.

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit +

---

<sup>i</sup> And yet, "In the grave with the body, but in Hades with the soul, as God in Paradise with the Thief, and on the Throne with the Father and the Spirit wast thou, O Christ, filling all things, thyself *uncircumscribed*."

<sup>ii</sup> Albeit the God-Man

<sup>iii</sup> This is found in Fr. Thomas Hopko's lecture on "Death and Dying."