

Reflection from January 2nd, 2020

Pre-feast of Theophany; Our Holy Father Sylvester, Pope of Rome (335)

(Luke 21:28 - 33 ; Hebrews 10:35 - 11:7)

I think the point of putting this Gospel reading together with this epistle reading is to say, "Have faith, have courage, and do not lose your longing for the Kingdom." I have a friend who told me about his sorrow and longing to be reunited with his twin who died in a miscarriage. He thought that his sorrow and longing were unique to him but I believe everyone in a sense shares this longing - its origin is the desire for God, for paradise lost. It's a Holy Longing, and a Holy Sorrow and every person shares in it. We are homeless in this world. We long for our true home.

Have faith, because in those fleeting moments I see and feel the perfect light that is our true home, where there is a boundless and ever pouring love like music weeping. Have faith, because there is a joy, an ever-ascending joy, a wonder and an awe spiraling endlessly around the ever-rising throne of God, lifted by rivers of joyous tears trembling with prisms. Have faith because there there is eternal life. I have felt it. Eternal life! Heaven and earth will pass away, but only Christ's words will remain. And what are His words but, "Love"? (1 John 4:16) The chaff will burn away in a blaze and only Love will remain.

But in my weakness I am dragged back down into distraction, into pettiness, into the darkness, into the grey mediocrity of mundane days. But mediocrity is a lie, mundane days are a lie. Excessive comfort is a lie. Christ says in the Book of Revelations "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of My mouth." (Revelations 3:16) Truly, truly because Christ is not mediocre or meaningless or dull. His truth is a sword. Every dull moment has the potential to be cloven in two and flooded with echoes of light and love, like a mirror facing another mirror, reflections of reflections of reflections cascading like bridges of echoing diamonds that lead to the Kingdom of Heaven.

But have faith, and have courage. Faith is to reject the mundane, the mediocre, the hopeless, the meaningless, the dim, the self-seeking pettiness, the distractions, the doubt, the fear. Faith rejects it, and though it be chained to this world it sings through its tears. Faith says yes to love, an endless love, even though it becomes obscured in shadows, in the midst of pain and sorrow and loss. Faith holds onto awe and wonder. Faith does not fear death, but it is in awe of it, but welcomes it, trembling, and its heart sings because it knows the glory of the age to come. St. John of the Ladder said a monk " is a soul who is pained by the constant remembrance of death." And I think in contemplating death we actually in turn contemplate life, the potential fullness of this life we find ourselves in, the awesome and terrifying mystery of Being, the holy name of God set as a seal over our hearts, I AM THAT I AM, the same name of God Moses fell on his face before, is burned into the fibers of our being. And His is a love that is stronger than death. (Song of Songs 8:6)

Our Holy Father St. Basil the Great said, "When the intellect is no longer dissipated among external things or dispersed across the world through the senses, it returns to itself, and by

means of itself it ascends to the thought of God.” Put more briefly, Hieromonk Maximos from Mt. Athos says, “To dwell in undistracted stillness and silence is to dwell in the presence of God.”

There is a great truth in this. We see how we stand submerged within the very eye of God in every moment. The eternally present moment *is* the eye of God. And His eye is flooded with tears because I, His child, am so thankless, I am so petty, I am so blind. He has given everything has been given to me, but in my blindness I can't see it, and so I lose faith. Contemplating death is painful, but it's only painful because it tears open the sealed over wound in our heart and the Spirit explodes through it like a geyser of light, drowning us from the inside out, killing the death that we cling to, so that the shining visage of Christ can emerge from the water, transfigured, dripping with light.

Have faith my brothers and sisters. We are children of eternal joy, and eternal joy is our true home, and to eternal joy we will return. And we'll live forever, free.

Glory be to Jesus Christ.

- Br. Isaac

*“What profundity of richness, what mind and exalted wisdom is God's! What compassionate kindness and abundant goodness belongs to the Creator! ... In love did He bring the world into existence; in love does He guide it during this its temporal existence; in love is He going to bring it to that wondrous transformed state, and in love will the world be swallowed up in the great mystery of Him who has performed all these things; in love will the whole course of the governance of creation be finally comprised.” - St. Isaac the Syrian*