

The dilemma of contemporary man

Contemporary man is called to evaluate the two citizenships the earthly and the heavenly one. To take into his consideration the teaching of the Gospel and of the Church about the Kingdom of the heavens, but simultaneously to counterbalance all the goods of the present life.

The starting out occurs from what this life offers us, because it is the direct sensorial reality we are living. From the moment when God's providence brings us to this world, we are called to come to know it, to evaluate it and to live it. We cannot reject it, because the denial of life is the denial of God's will, of His gift.

And the question is posed: With what criteria will this evaluation occur? Fleshly criteria? Haughty criteria? Naïve criteria? Academic criteria? Everything is taken into consideration to harmonize the cultural and social surroundings we will live in. However a firm, unshakable, tried criterion is needed for the correct choices to occur, for the measure to be found. And this comes out very clearly from today's Epistle Reading. It is faith in the true God.
Archim. Ch. N.

SUNDAY December 22nd Sunday before Nativity, Anastasia the Great Martyr, Chrysogonos, Theodota, Evodias, & Eutychianus, the Martyrs
First Tone, Fourth Eothinon, - Epistle St.Paul's Letter to Letter to the Hebrews 11:9-10; 32-40, **Gospel** Matthew 1:1-25
NEXT SUNDAY December 29th Sunday after Nativity, 14,000 infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod in Bethlehem, Our Righteous Father Marcellus, Abbot of the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones, Our Righteous Father Thaddeus the Confessor
Epistle St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 1:11-19
Gospel Matthew 2:13-23



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THE CITIZENSHIP OF THE EARTH AND THE CITIZENSHIP OF THE HEAVENS

While the Christians live on earth and simultaneously await the citizenship of the heavens. They seek the heavenly "city" (Heb. 13:14), which is permanent. They live in other words, among two citizenships, which differ very much between them. The one has its foundations on the earth which God created, but people built it. The other has God himself as founder and architect, as the Ap. Paul mentions: "the city which has foundations and whose architect and creator is God".

The believers can't however dwell directly in the city of heaven, in the Kingdom of the heavens, without passing by this earth. The role of life is definitive, which we live, in this material world, for our hope and expectation for the other life to become a reality. Because here faith is sewn and cultivated and here each Christian's spiritual struggle is conducted. The apostle intensely stresses this, who refers to the struggle of faith of the righteous people of the Old Testament. With the power of faith in the true God they worked miracles, faced the authorities of the world, forbore trials and persecutions, even tortures.

SUNDAY'S EPISTLE ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE HEBREWS 11:9-10; 32-40

BRETHREN, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The power of faith as an expectation of eternity

Why did the saints and righteous people of the Old Testament hold such a struggle? And why is the same struggle demanded for all the members of the Church, the faithful Christians of this world? Of course, their struggle didn't aim at them inheriting this earth.

Even though God had promised to Abraham the land of promise, Palestine, where he would become father of a whole nation, of the Jewish one. However to such a righteous man one part of the earth did not suffice, as a reward. Although Moses, with his prayer opened the Red Sea for the people of God to pass through and he was granted to take in his hands the Law of God, nevertheless he was not granted to enter into the earthly land of his forbearers. He was worthy of something much better.

Because they themselves awaited something better, something higher from the moment God entered into their life. But God also was destining them not for this earth, but for something better, "having foreseen something better", that is the eternal life. Their faith and dedication to God was so great that it can't be compared with whatsoever worldly value, as the Apostle writes: "of whom the world was not worthy". And even if their value would be weighed against this world, their virtue would weigh down, because it is more precious than this earth, the sacred Chrysostom also mentions.

Consequently the expectation of all people of God of the Old and New Testaments, of all Christians is eternal life, the Jerusalem above, that which Christ preached: "the kingdom of the heavens". It is the lifestyle for which He shed His Blood on the Cross. It is the new world, whose beginning began from then when Christ came to the earth and its completion occurred with His Resurrection and His ascent to heaven, where He prepared for us "rooms, dwellings in a city whose foundations aren't shaken, nor is it corrupted by time, because there God's eternity dwells.