

December 21, 2014

EVERLASTING FATHER

Psalm 89:19-27 Romans 8:14-17 John 14:21-24

It could be said that the quality of the kingdom is determined by the character of the king. It could also be said that the quality of the kingdom is determined by the quality of the *homes* within that kingdom. And, it could be said that the quality of the homes can be determined by the character of the parents, the providers, the mothers and fathers who give their children the gifts of life and love, comfort and care, security and instruction.

Isaiah envisioned the coming of a King whose character is ideal, whose reign is perfect whose authority is enlightened, and whose judgment is righteous. *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...and His name shall be called.... ‘Everlasting Father!’”* And we believe that it is Jesus Christ, the Son-who-is-the-Father, who fulfills Isaiah’s vision. *“If you had known me, you would have known My Father also... I am in the Father and the Father in me.”* (John 14:7, 11)

Consider the home that Jesus provides. It is a house with many rooms where Jesus prepares a place for us. (John 14:2-3) It is His Father’s house, but He has inherited it. *“All that the Father has is mine.”* (John 16:15) The picture Jesus gives of heaven in the 14th Chapter of the Gospel of John is that of a home, a house where someone has prepared a place for you, a place where you can go and where you know you belong.

I believe the Church is like that. The Church is the gift that Jesus Christ has given the world. Jesus is the gift that God has given. As a place to belong, the Church is a refuge, a place of sanctuary. The Church is a place for the whole family. It can offer the serenity of kindness and the comfort of love. It can provide the conditions for care and the grace of salvation, of preservation, and of consolation. In the Church is the gift of life’s goodness, the generosity of thanksgiving and the hospitality of heaven. But more than anything else, the Church is relationships. In the Church is the tie that binds us together in human relationships that will determine not only the course of our journey through this world, but also the destination of our eternal soul. Jesus calls us to so live together in this life that in the world to come we may have life everlasting. *“If a person loves me, they will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”* (John 14:23) This is the spirit of the Church, the Spirit of God. The spirit of love.

“All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God... You have received the spirit of sonship (adoption). When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” (Romans 8:14-17) Heirs of eternal life. Heirs of God’s house with many rooms.

And just as much as our children are gifts that God has given to us, we too are gifts that we can give to God. And we are gifts that we can give to each other. You are the greatest gift you have to offer. Perhaps as we give Christmas gifts to one another, we are giving little pieces of ourselves. The gifts you give reflect who you are. They can magnify what you want to be to one another, and they can represent the relationship you already have.

I would like to give a gift to you. It’s a simple gift because it’s only words. But first, I’d like to thank God for giving me the gift of you, this Church. I must acknowledge, however, that, of course, this Church is not mine, nor is it yours. It belongs to Jesus Christ, and we are sharing this gift. But as this gift is here for us to share, I’d like to give myself to you anew, for I want to be everything you need me to be. And secondly, I’d like to give you something my friend Mark Vickroy has inspired. In a way, you could say it’s from both of us. I’d like to give you the words, the lyrics of a song:

When I Look at You

When I look at you, I am surrounded
By people who love me, people who care;
Not just 'cause I'm me, and not just 'cause I'm good,
But 'cause for all of us, Jesus is there.

Something is burning. It's something inside.
I have a vision that all I can see,
And all I can hear, and all I can know
are beautiful souls that Jesus sets free!

The Kingdom of heaven is where we'll all be
Together in faith, together with Jesus.
He will have healed us and helped us to see
The power of love, the power that frees us.

I can see heaven now, a wonderful fire.
It makes me so warm and the love never ends.
Here's to the feeling you always inspire!
I just want to share it 'cause you are my friends!

I'm all I ever hoped to be.
And all I ever hoped to do
Was share the love God gave to me,
And walk with you,
just walk with you.

May this House of God be a place where everyone who comes into it can feel a sense of the presence of the *Everlasting Father*, who came long ago as an infant, incarnate in human flesh, *true God of true God, of One Being with the Father; ...through whom all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.*

May this house be a place where the beliefs of our faith are perpetuated, and God is glorified in all that we say and in all that we do. Jesus taught us to pray, with the confidence of children:
Our Father....