

I HAVE COME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE



HIS IS ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). In these few simple words from the Holy Gospel we find the Biblical vision of our life's goal set forth. Life without end means knowing God and Jesus His Son.

Most of us feel that we know God and Jesus because we know the facts about God which the Church teaches. But knowing God and knowing about God are very different. The person who knows the contents of God's "file" (the Scriptures, the Creed, etc.) does not necessarily know God personally. We can know many facts about God and even repeat what we know to others without ever encountering Him in a life-giving way. As we read in the Epistle of James, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well; but even the demons believe – and they tremble"* (James 2:19). Knowing facts about God does not automatically transform anyone into a person of dynamic faith.

Many people live their entire life with a "beginners' faith." They may accept the Gospel and the Tradition and live a pious life. Their faith is real, but it is the faith of children who accept what they are told without having any personal experience to back it up. Their faith is in something unknown and remote, not something known firsthand. As a result hardship or temptation may seriously shake this kind of faith. You cannot fight any challenge to your faith with only a theory of God.

A person whose faith is based on their awareness of God's active presence in their life, however, will know God through experience as power and life. For them the asser-

tions of Christ – I am the way, the truth, the life, the vine, the good shepherd – are not abstractions. They are images which describe the actions of God as they have encountered Him in their own life. They know the truth of St Paul's assertion *"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose"* (Romans 8:28).

Many people have found the following exercise helpful in seeing the hand of God in their life. Take a few moments to recall all the coincidences that you consider turning points in your life. Imagine how your life might have developed without those coincidences and experiences. Do you think that these coincidences are just random events or are connected in a way we can only begin to comprehend? Are the formative events of our lives merely accidental or coincidental?

The believer knows that the universe did not come about by chance – it is ultimately the work of God. The person who is aware that his or her life has a purpose and direction must see the same divine hand at work. The mature believer comes to know the presence of God not only in these climactic moments but also at every moment in their lives. They are no longer just reading "God's file;" they know Him at work, giving them a place in His plan for the salvation of the world. They become eager to take an active place in His service.

Knowing God personally in our lives is not opposed to knowing Him as He has revealed Himself in the world. If our personal experiences seem at odd with the Scriptures, the Fathers or the common witness of the historic Churches, then our experiences may lead us to delusion. If "God" is telling us to violate

the commandments, for example, we can be sure that the source of that message is not God. Our own imagination or the promptings of demonic powers may be the source of these urgings.

THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION



The source of our Scriptures, our liturgy and many of our practices of prayer and fasting – was born from the apostles' personal experience of Christ in the flesh and of the Holy Spirit whom they received after the resurrection. Key elements came to be synthesized in the early creeds, particularly the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed formulated at the first two Ecumenical Councils and confessed at every Divine Liturgy. This Apostolic Tradition is further expressed in the writings the Church Fathers, the texts of the Churches' liturgies, and the witness of the saints. It presents us with a picture of God as:

CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH



The Source of all that is: the One to whom we owe all our thanks for whatever we are and whatever we have.

THE HOLY TRINITY



In a way we cannot comprehend. God is the Father of His eternal Son and Word, and the One from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds.

CHRIST, THE LOVER OF MANKIND

God so loved the world that as Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Word of God becomes man to share our world, like us in all things except sin. He took on our humanity, showing us that our frail and fragile bodies can bear the presence of God.

The Gospels give us images of what the Lord Jesus is meant to be for believers of all times. In them we see Him as:

- The Bread of Life (cf. John 6:32-59) ... the One who would nourish and strengthen us throughout our life.
- The One who would quench our thirst with the Holy Spirit (cf. John 8:37-39)
- The Light of the World (cf. John 8:12) ... who would illumine our path in this life.
- The Gate (cf. John 10:7) ... the One through whom we go to find pasture.
- The Good Shepherd (cf. John 10:14) ... who would – and did – lay down his life for His sheep.
- The Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. John 14:6) ... the only One through whom we have access to the Father.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, experienced all the weaknesses of human life, including temptation, but without sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15). His physical presence among us was necessarily short like ours; yet His presence would continue forever with us in another way. He promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit as “another Paraclete, to be with you al-

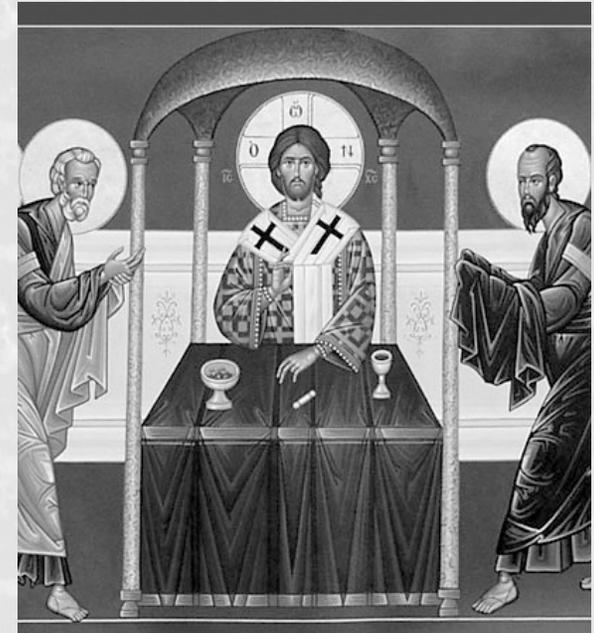
ways” (John 14:16). The Spirit did, in fact, come upon the Church as Jesus promised to:

- “Teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (John 14:26)
- Testify to the truth of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world (cf. John 15:26).
- Empower the Church to bestow forgiveness of sins (cf. John 20:22-23).

It is through the Holy Spirit that we experience Christ in the Church. The Spirit inspired the writing and collecting of the Scriptures to touch the hearts of people of every age. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the mysteries as vehicles of Christ’s saving, nurturing and forgiving love. It is the Spirit who bestows a multitude of gifts in the Church for the good of all. It is this same Spirit who has led Christians through the ages from “beginner’s faith” to holiness and ultimate glorification as saints.

God is thus not just the source of our earthly life but of our eternal life as well through Jesus Christ. Immersing ourselves in this life we can experience all that union with God can provide. As the Lord Jesus affirmed, “I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

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