

Second Evening Prayer of Lent

Bulletin

'Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.'

+INJ+

So St. Paul writes concerning the Judaizers, those Christians who believed that it was necessary that a gentile first make himself a Jew before he would be able to become a servant of Christ.

To be a Jew was to be a child of Abraham, and of the promise, first given to that Patriarch that countless would be his children, and blessed be all nations through his bloodline. A Jew was a chosen one, elected by God in ancient times to be the vehicle of salvation to the world, to first enact in themselves, and then to teach to the heathen the good and righteous laws of God, and in so doing, banish from the earth the malice and superstition of the pagans, and of their bloodletting priests, and their bloodthirsty gods.

A Jew was to be a light unto the world, and Jerusalem a city on a hill, even the *holy hill of Zion*, not to be hidden beneath a basket, but to be a lamp before our feet, and a light before our path; to keep our feet from stumbling, and to confound the darkness. All nations would come to the Lord's Temple, and worship in his courts, casting off their Ba'als and Asherahs, and worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth.

The abominations of the gods would be abolished, the sacrifice of children and the whoredom on the high places, and instead men would *offer their reasonable service, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, lifting up their hearts, and taking the cup of salvation.*

They would *pay their vows not to idols made with hands, unspeaking and unthinking, of wood and bronze and gold, but in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of Jerusalem.*

And all this by the Jews.

It is only reasonable that if one wishes to worship the one true God, one must become a citizen of God's one true people.

And how can this be done, if one is not born of a Jew? Should *he crawl back into the womb to be born again?*

The answer is simple, and quick, though perhaps not enjoyable: circumcision.

It is the circumcision of the flesh that marks the child of Abraham. Instituted by the Lord himself as the means by which even pagan Abram, born in *Ur of the Chaldees*, might be considered *born of God, born again, the father of many nations*.

If by circumcision even godless Abraham might be reborn, then so too the gentile, godless also, be made a child of God.

It seems to us, in our enlightened times, an odd thing, even an embarrassing thing, that circumcision would be given by God as the sign of His people. It is very much a strange sign, as it is a sign which would be considered a felony to show anyone publicly.

Yet it is indeed a proper sign, for it is a confession. *For by one man sin came into the world*, and so each man born of that first father would mark that by which his children were born with a wound, and a scar, to show that his father before him was marked for death, even as his children after him would be conceived through an injury. And that this mark, this wound, should be in such a private place is indeed very proper, for it is proper to hide one's iniquity. That a newborn male child, on the eighth day, should bleed is only proper, for by his generation will men continue to bleed and spill blood until the judgment.

For the sign of circumcision, if you will hear it, simply prays what is written: *'For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.'*

To be a Jew, then, is first and foremost to confess one's sin, and the weight of the Lord's justice over his life.

How proper it is then that those who are about to receive forgiveness through the washing of baptism should first confess their transgressions in the cutting of a knife.

But to those who require this, to those who *preach the flesh*, St. Paul condemns as dogs, destined *for destruction, greedy, shameful, and profane, even enemies of the cross of Christ*, rejecting their demands upon the gentile, even counting his circumcision and all his keeping of the statutes of Moses as a word that cannot be said in church.

It begins to seem that it is not the Judaizers that are being unreasonable in their request, but Paul who is irrational in his vitriolic condemnation.

Yet the Holy Apostle explains himself simply: *but our citizenship is in heaven*.

By the Law, by the circumcision, by the confession of our wickedness, we were indeed drawn out from the land of the demonic gods, delivered from Egypt into the wandering of an earthly purgatory, no longer being a slave, yet having no home; no longer in service to sin, but not yet a servant of righteousness. We were no longer lost, but not yet found. God had delivered His people from His wrath, but not yet brought them to Himself.

We wandered in search of a king, but found him not, for indeed *our God is a God who hides himself*.

But in His good time, the king did come, desiring only to talk again with His beloved Adam, and His dear Eve. *He descended from heaven*, to find that which He had lost, that the lost may be found; and here did He find us, as a beaten man lying in a ditch, or a sheep without a shepherd. Bearing us up upon His shoulders, He returned us to His fold; and aiding us in our injury, He took us to the inn, paying our stay with the two coins of His divine kindness and His human suffering, promising to pay the remainder of the redemption price upon His return.

And in all this He rejoiced greatly, as a woman who found a lost coin, or as the angels in heaven over the one who repents.

For He has prepared from all eternity a glorious city, a New Jerusalem, with twelve walls, and flowing with great rivers; and from all time He has longed only

for a people to dwell in it, the sheep of His flock. And these He has now found: you, beloved of the Lord, you He has found, to bear you home to the presence of the Father, for indeed, by His blood, *your citizenship is in heaven.*

It is still altogether seemly that, like children ashamed of displeasing their parents, we come with tears in our eyes before the Lord, confessing the wrongs we have done, the hurt we have caused, the sin we have committed, and flesh we have indulged, and promising to do better. But as a mother before her weeping son, or a father before his broken-hearted daughter, He cleans our faces by the washing of the Holy Spirit, and feeds us from His own store with His body and blood; for He knows our burden is heavy. And holding us close, He speaks to us a quiet word:

'Comfort, comfort, ye, my people. Your warfare is accomplished.'

+INJ+