

February 24, 2008
The Sunday of the Prodigal Son

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

I take it for granted that the historical and theological continuity linking the Church to ancient Israel pertains to Christian dogmatic truth. I do concede that perhaps the Church took full conscious possession of this truth only when Marcion challenged it in the second century. Nonetheless, the quickness and clarity of the Church's response at that time was ample testimony to her profound, abiding conviction on the point. Marcion's attack on the Old Testament was felt to be an assault on the very being of the Church, and she responded vigorously, from the depths of her identity--the substance and profile of her memory. From that perspective, Marcion's heresy, she saw, was an experiment in amnesia.

The Church's identity, nonetheless, involves more than her formal essence (*morphe*). We should also think of it as existential, inasmuch as it resides in her conscious experience, the matter, or "stuff" (*hyle*), of her living memory. That is to say, the Church is who she is, because she has never--since the time of Abraham--forgotten who she is.

This unbroken memory of the Church is incarnate in her institutions--especially the Sacred Scriptures, the sacraments and their attendant ministries, the dogmatic determinations of the councils, the piety and preaching, the worship with its ritual, music, and art, and so forth.

In addition, the Church's identifying memory is conveyed in the evangelization of her members, whereby they too take possession of their inheritance as the people of God.

To illustrate this last point, we may consider the apostle Timothy as a sort of case study. We are encouraged in this consideration by recalling what St. Paul wrote to the young man, "But you, abide in those things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures [*hiera grammata*], which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 3: 14-15).

In this precious text we learn important features of the Church's continuity with ancient Israel, especially how that continuity was experienced in the evangelization of the young. It is clear from this passage that, in the case of Timothy, this historical continuity was accomplished in the formation of a soul shaped by the continuity itself.

Even as a child, Timothy gradually took possession of a living past, as he was being raised in a devout Jewish home. He belonged to that first generation of Jews who

became Christians while still in childhood, and he experienced no break in what he learned. Raised in the "grammar" of the Holy Scriptures by his mother and grandmother (Eunice and Lois--1:5), he moved to faith in Christ as a seamless process. The transition from the Old Testament to the New took place in his own person, and with no more disruption than that of a child receiving a new gift from the same loving parents. Such was the power and quality of Timothy's domestic evangelization.

Timothy's soul took its shape from the living memory of a people preserved in the stability of the home. Because he knew where he came from, he always knew who he was, and this was no small blessing in the deracinated Roman world around him.

As he grew older, the living model of Paul came into his life, and Timothy's soul grew further by the imitation of this model. Indeed, Paul told him, "But you have carefully followed my teaching, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience" (3: 10). Paul's example and teaching was of whole cloth with what Timothy had learned at home.

In Timothy, then, we have a case study of how the living identity of the people of God passed from ancient Israel to the Church. Young Timothy was aware of no disruption between being a child of Abraham and a disciple of Christ. Quite literally, he passed from the Law and the Prophets to the Epistles, as components of a single experience.

Timothy's upbringing also provides a model for the evangelization of the young. Ideally, it has its beginning as a domestic enterprise, enacted in homes where the sustained cultivation of the biblical grammar confers its godly contours on the character of the children. Such children become part of salvation history, as they are made wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

©2008 Patrick Henry Reardon

**All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor

phri@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:

www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

Pastoral Ponderings:

http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php