

A NOTE FROM FATHER EICKHOFF

The last verses of today's Second Reading from the 2nd Letter of St. Paul to Timothy contain what is thought to be the words from a very early Christian hymn:

If we have died with him
we shall also live with him;
if we persevere
we shall also reign with him.
But if we deny him
he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny himself.

This passage is explicitly described by St. Paul as a summation of his previous words to Timothy. Before this passage St. Paul encourages Timothy to be steadfast in his Christian faith and gives to Timothy the examples of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer who remain dedicated to their task and their vocation and therefore gain the rewards promised to them. In the case of the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer those rewards are of earthly things. In the case of the Christian the reward is everlasting life with God. For St. Paul, all of the difficulties and trials he undergoes are worth it in order to win eternal life. And he encourages St. Timothy (and us today) to remain with Christ even when undergoing hardship.

Consider the words of the hymn. The first line speaks of how in Baptism we have been joined to Jesus Christ through sharing in His sacrificial death. We have died in Christ, but in dying, we also gain the hope of living forever with Christ. The second line reminds us that Jesus Christ is the true and eternal king of the heavens and the earth. All of the earthly powers and rulers will in time disappear, but Christ remains forever. We need to hold fast to Christ here and now and, if we do so, we will one day share in Christ's victory and rulership over all of creation. The next line reminds us that simply being Baptized is not an automatic "get into heaven free card." We must throughout our lives live by Christ's teaching, act on Christ's grace that has been given to us, and even in difficulties continue to believe in Jesus Christ. We all know how difficult this can be for us fallible human beings, and so the last line gives us hope. The last line reminds us that even though we often stray from God, God always remains good for the promises given to us.

On an entirely different topic, I will be on vacation next week (October 16-22) and will be backpacking in the Appalachian Mountains. I will not be able to respond to emails or phone calls during that time. I will return any messages after I get back.

Yours in Christ,

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Pastor