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THE NEW SHOFAR

Satan was defeated by the glorious death of Christ

As long as we live in Christ, we share that victory

The doors of heaven are open wide

One of the abiding messages from John's Revelation is how Christ has opened up the doors of heaven. Of course, he is speaking figuratively but the message is one of great reassurance and hope. We can now access God's throne room, find our way to the very throne of God – in Christ. With that as our starting point, nothing becomes impossible if we make use of that gift and sit down and open our plans to God. Note those signs of power - lightening, thunder, earthquakes and so on. Having access to God means having access to the fullness of God's power.

The woman robed in the sun – holy mother Church

John was writing to and for a Church in crisis with many of her problems coming from within the faith communities themselves. These internal disaffections caused more serious problems than did the actual Roman persecutions. The Romans hated the Christians because they would not worship the emperor and the national gods. Their enmity was out in the open and could be dealt with. However, when others within the Church, pursued agendas other than the unity, wellbeing and mission of the Church, the damage they were doing was often disguised as being for the “good of the Church”. The reality was, for John, they were in pursuit of personal hopes and dreams. Disguised as being “for the good of the Church” but dividing the Body of Christ that was called to be one under the teachings of the Apostles. Christ's Body must be united, must be one in its mission and ministry or it is not authentic.

“Birthing” Christ into the world is our only vocation

Thus we have this mysterious pregnant woman. She has around her all of the signs of Israel of old (twelve tribes) as well as the reconstituted Israel (the twelve apostles). Importantly, we are told of her intent: she is about to give birth. Therein we have presented to us the mission and ministry of each Christian person individually and the entire Church as a single body in Christ. Our words, our deeds, our thoughts, plans and activities are to bring Christ alive in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. If Christ is not “being-born” in what we are doing then we are called to retreat, repent and head off in a truly Kingdom direction. This is not a bad way of evaluating what we are doing: *is this action bringing Christ alive?*

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anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghongod.com

But all was not well for this woman just as things were not going all that well for John's Church. In opposition stood this huge red dragon. He was mighty in power (seven horns), smart (ten heads) and already reigning in some way (seven coronets). But this is not just about some universal picture. For the prophet, it is meant to apply whenever and wherever the Church is going about its mission. There are always going to be, and always will be powerful forces against God's works. Thus, the dragon has taken up a position to devour the baby as soon as it is born. This demonic action represents all of those things hindering or opposing, directly or indirectly the fundamental mission of the Church: bringing Christ alive in what is happening.

The woman, however, was under divine protection and her son was born safely. John's point again – nothing can stop the saving works of God in human history. No matter how strong and powerful the Beast - (any and all of the opposition to what God is achieving in Christ, through the Church) – the Son is born and the Son rules with the fullness of power and authority (an iron sceptre). Not only does He rule, but He rules from the throne of God. He is at one with God.

Being taken up to the heavenly throne does not mean absent from earthly activities. Remember, heaven has no closed doors. The Father is accessed through the Son. Directly. In person. The word John uses over and over again is *victory* or *conquering*. God **is being** victorious in the Son and all who live in Him and give birth to him in the world.

As long as we are living and acting in Christ, victory is guaranteed

Why is this of such importance? Because the woman is forced to flee into the wilderness and it is there in the desert she – we – live to the present day. Pursued by the Beast but *looked after* by God. Hounded on all quarters but kept safe and sound as she goes about her mission in that wilderness. With her Son seated with God on the throne, why would she fear anything? Why hesitate in any works of mission? The Son is enthroned, is reigning and wants all disciples to share in His victory. In the “wilderness” we may be striving to live the Gospel but we have a source of strength no Evil can overcome. If we are not victorious, God cannot be blamed.

This is the message of today's Gospel. It is in and through God's grace at work in the Church that victory is achieved. John understood this key message. He lived and ministered to church communities struggling with all kinds of demonic activities but the least threatening were those forces working on the outside. They could be defeated. However, John's message was directed to a tougher demonic force – those Christians who worked on their own agendas, who put aside the unity of the Body in Christ and threatened Gospel ministry, were undoing the “birthing of Christ” for distractions, sidelines, personal preferences and self-aggrandisement. These people were more dangerous than an all-out attack by savage armies and did more harm to Christ's disciples than anyone or anything else. It must all be about Christ if we are to be faithful.

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