

THE FLOCK

الرعيّة

Church Website: www.saintgeorge.org.au

Published by: St George's Antiochian Orthodox Church

Sunday 16th November 2008 (46)

THE EPISTLE

Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us.
Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.

Section from the First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.
(1 Corinthians 4:9-16)

Brethren, God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, and we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things. I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

THE GOSPEL

The reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew.
(Matthew 9:9-13)

At that time, as Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST MATTHEW

The Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, was also named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27); he was one of the Twelve Apostles (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:45; Acts 1:13), and was brother of the Apostle James Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). He was a publican, or tax-collector for Rome, in a time when the Jews were under the rule of the Roman Empire. He lived in the Galilean city of Capernaum. When Matthew heard the voice of Jesus Christ: "Come, follow Me" (Mt. 9:9), left everything and followed the Savior. Christ and His disciples did not refuse Matthew's invitation and they visited his house, where they shared table with the publican's friends and acquaintances. Like the host, they were also publicans and known sinners. This event disturbed the pharisees and scribes a great deal.

Publicans who collected taxes from their countrymen did this with great profit for themselves. Usually greedy and cruel people, the Jews considered them pernicious betrayers of their country and religion. The word "publican" for the Jews had the connotation of "public sinner" and "idol-worshipper." To even speak with a tax-collector was considered a sin, and to associate with one was defilement. But the Jewish teachers were not able to comprehend that the Lord had "come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mt. 9:13).

Matthew, acknowledging his sinfulness, repaid fourfold anyone he had cheated, and he distributed his remaining possessions to the poor, and he followed after Christ with the other apostles. St Matthew was attentive to the instructions of the Divine Teacher, he beheld His innumerable miracles, he went together with the Twelve Apostles preaching to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 10:6). He was a witness to the suffering, death, and Resurrection of the Savior, and of His glorious Ascension into Heaven.

Having received the grace of the Holy Spirit, which descended upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, St Matthew preached in Palestine for several years. At the request of the Jewish converts at Jerusalem, the holy Apostle Matthew wrote his Gospel describing the earthly life of the Savior, before leaving to preach the Gospel in faraway lands.

In the order of the books of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew comes first. Palestine is said to be the place where the Gospel was written. St Matthew wrote in Aramaic, and then it was translated into Greek. The Aramaic text has not survived, but many of the linguistic and cultural-historical peculiarities of the Greek translation give indications of it.

The Apostle Matthew preached among people who were awaiting the Messiah. His Gospel manifests itself as a vivid proof that Jesus Christ is the Messiah foretold by the prophets, and that there would not be another (Mt. 11:3).

The preaching and deeds of the Savior are presented by the evangelist in three divisions, constituting three aspects of the service of the Messiah: as Prophet and Law-Giver (Ch. 5-7), Lord over the world both visible and invisible (Ch. 8-25), and finally as High Priest offered as Sacrifice for the sins of all mankind (Ch. 26-27). The theological content of the Gospel, besides the Christological themes,

includes also the teaching about the Kingdom of God and about the Church, which the Lord sets forth in parables about the inner preparation for entering into the Kingdom (Ch. 5-7), about the worthiness of servers of the Church in the world (Ch. 10-11), about the signs of the Kingdom and its growth in the souls of mankind (Ch. 13), about the humility and simplicity of the inheritors of the Kingdom (Mt. 18:1-35; 19 13-30; 20:1-16; 25-27; 23:1-28), and about the eschatological revelations of the Kingdom in the Second Coming of Christ within the daily spiritual life of the Church (Ch. 24-25).

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Church are closely interconnected in the spiritual experience of Christianity: the Church is the historical embodiment of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world, and the Kingdom of Heaven is the Church of Christ in its eschatological perfection (Mt. 16:18-19; 28:18-20).

The holy Apostle brought the Gospel of Christ to Syria, Media, Persia, Parthia, and finishing his preaching in Ethiopia with a martyr's death. This land was inhabited by tribes of cannibals with primitive customs and beliefs. The holy Apostle Matthew converted some of the idol-worshippers to faith in Christ. He founded the Church and built a temple in the city of Mirmena, establishing there his companion Platon as bishop.

When the holy apostle was fervently entreating God for the conversion of the Ethiopians the Lord Himself appeared to him in the form of a youth. He gave him a staff, and commanded him to plant it at the doors of the church. The Lord said that a tree would grow from this staff and it would bear fruit, and from its roots would flow a stream of water. When the Ethiopians washed themselves in the water and ate the fruit, they lost their wild ways and became gentle and good.

When the holy apostle carried the staff towards the church, he was met by the wife and son of the ruler of the land, Fulvian, who were afflicted by unclean spirits. In the Name of Christ the holy apostle healed them. This miracle converted a number of the pagans to the Lord. But the ruler did not want his subjects to become Christians and cease worshipping the pagan gods. He accused the apostle of sorcery and gave orders to execute him.

They put St Matthew head downwards, piled up brushwood and ignited it. When the fire flared up, everyone then saw that the fire did not harm St Matthew. Then Fulvian gave orders to add more wood to the fire, and frenzied with boldness, he commanded to set up twelve idols around the fire. But the flames melted the idols and flared up toward Fulvian. The frightened Ethiopian turned to the saint with an entreaty for mercy, and by the prayer of the martyr the flame went out. The body of the holy apostle remained unharmed, and he departed to the Lord.

The ruler Fulvian deeply repented of his deed, but still he had doubts. By his command, they put the body of St Matthew into an iron coffin and threw it into the sea. In doing this Fulvian said that if the God of Matthew would preserve the body of the apostle in the water as He preserved him in the fire, then this would be proper reason to worship this One True God.

That night the Apostle Matthew appeared to Bishop Platon in a dream, and commanded him to go with clergy to the shore of the sea and to find his body there. The righteous Fulvian and his retinue went with the bishop to the shore of the sea. The coffin carried by the waves was taken to the church built by the apostle. Then Fulvian begged forgiveness of the holy Apostle Matthew, after which Bishop Platon baptized him, giving him the name Matthew in obedience to a command of God.

Soon St Fulvian-Matthew abdicated his rule and became a presbyter. Upon the death of Bishop Platon, the Apostle Matthew appeared to him and exhorted him to head the Ethiopian Church. Having become a bishop, St Fulvian-Matthew toiled at preaching the Word of God, continuing the work of his heavenly patron.

CHURCH NEWS

SPEEDY RECOVERY

Our thoughts and prayers are with our beloved brethren Shadia El-Khoury, Ayoub Mawal, Zaki Zaibak and Shawki Abou-Haidar in their time of sickness. We wish them a speedy recovery!

FORTY DAY MEMORIAL SERVICE

A "Forty Day Liturgy and Memorial Service" will be held next Sunday 23rd November 2008, at 10.30am, for the repose of the soul of the late Issam Safadi, from Rashayya Alfakhar, South Lebanon. We convey our condolences to his wife Rosette Safadi, her children, his brother and their families. May he rest in peace!

ST GEORGE'S FESTIVAL

The Annual St George's Festival date has changed from November 8th to November 22nd. For this to be successful we need volunteers to help on the day during setup, cleanup, and the days activities.

If you would like to volunteer and help your Church on this special day please contact one of the Parish Council members or call George Ibrahim on: 0403 718 496.

If you have any items to donate towards the festival it would be greatly appreciated. Please do not bring unwanted broken items as last year we were given many broken, unusable items that we were unable to sell on the day. If you could please bring these items, when you can, before the festival this would be greatly appreciated.

الرسالة

لَتَكُنْ يَا رَبُّ رَحْمَتَكَ عَلَيْنَا. إِنْتَهَجُوا أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُونَ بِالرَّبِّ.
فَصَلِّ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقِدِّيسِ، بُولْسِ الرَّسُولِ الْأَوْلَى إِلَى أَهْلِ كُورِنْثُوسِ.
(1 كُورِنْثُوسِ 9:4-16)

يا إخوة، إنَّ اللهَ قَدْ أَبْرَزَنَا نَحْنُ الرُّسُلَ، آخِرِي النَّاسِ كَأَنَّنا مَجْعُولُونَ لِلْمَوْتِ.
لَأَنَّنا قَدْ صِرْنَا مَشْهُدًا لِلْعَالَمِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْبَشَرِ. نَحْنُ جُهَّالٌ مِنْ أَجْلِ الْمَسِيحِ، أَمَّا
أَنْتُمْ فَحُكَمَاءُ فِي الْمَسِيحِ. نَحْنُ ضِعْفَاءُ وَأَنْتُمْ أَقْوِيَاءُ. أَنْتُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ وَنَحْنُ مُهَانُونَ.
وإلى هذه السَّاعَةِ نَحْنُ نَجُوعُ وَنَعْطَشُ، وَنَعْرَى وَنُلْطَمُ وَلَا قَرَارَ لَنَا، وَنَتَّعِبُ
عَامِلِينَ بِأَيْدِينَا. نُنْشِئُ فَبَارِكُ، نُضْطَهِّدُ فَنَحْتَمِلُ، يُشْنَعُ عَلَيْنَا فَتَنْصَرِّعُ، قَدْ صِرْنَا
كَأَقْدَارِ الْعَالَمِ، وَكَأَوْسَاحِ يَسْتَحْضِنُهَا الْجَمِيعُ إِلَى الْآنِ. وَلَسْتُ لِأُحْجِلْكُمْ أَكْتُبُ
هَذَا، وَإِنَّمَا أُعْظِمُكُمْ كَأَوْلَادِي الْأَحْيَاءِ. لِأَنَّهُ وَلَوْ كَانَ لَكُمْ رِيَّةٌ مِنَ الْمُرْشِدِينَ فِي
الْمَسِيحِ، لَيْسَ لَكُمْ آبَاءٌ كَثِيرُونَ. لِأَنِّي أَنَا وَلَدْتُكُمْ فِي الْمَسِيحِ يَسُوعَ بِالْإِنْجِيلِ.
فَأَطْلُبُ إِلَيْكُمْ، أَنْ تَكُونُوا مُتَّبِعِينَ بِي.

الإنجيل

فَصَلِّ شَرِيفًا، مِنْ بَشَارَةِ الْقِدِّيسِ، مَتَّى الْإِنْجِيلِيِّ الْبَشِيرِ وَالتَّلْمِيذِ الطَّاهِرِ.
(مَتَّى 9:9-13)

في ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانِ، فِيمَا يَسُوعُ مُجْتَازًا، رَأَى إِنْسَانًا جَالِسًا عَلَى مَائِدَةِ الْجِيَايَةِ اسْمُهُ
مَتَّى، فَقَالَ لَهُ: اتَّبِعْنِي. فَقَامَ وَتَبِعَهُ. وَفِيمَا كَانَ مُتَّكِنًا فِي الْبَيْتِ، إِذَا بَعْشَارِينَ
كَثِيرِينَ وَخَطَاةً جَاءُوا وَاتَّكَأُوا مَعَ يَسُوعَ وَتَلَامِيذِهِ. فَلَمَّا نَظَرَ الْفَرِيسِيُّونَ، قَالُوا
لِتَلَامِيذِهِ: لِمَاذَا مُعَلِّمُكُمْ يَأْكُلُ مَعَ الْعَشَارِينَ وَالْخَطَاةِ؟ فَلَمَّا سَمِعَ يَسُوعُ قَالَ: لَا
يَحْتَاجُ الْأَصْحَاءُ إِلَى طَيِّبٍ، لَكِنْ ذَوُو الْأَسْقَامِ. فَادْهَبُوا وَعَلِّمُوا مَا هُوَ: إِنِّي
أُرِيدُ رَحْمَةً لَا ذَبِيحَةً. لِأَنِّي لَمْ آتِ لِأَدْعُو صِدِّيقِينَ، بَلْ خَطَاةً إِلَى التَّوْبَةِ.

العراق

شهد العراق، كسائر بلدان المشرق العربي، في تاريخه العريق تنوعًا دينيًا ووطنياً
ومذهبياً. وكتب التاريخ ملأى بالروايات والقصص عن التعايش السلمي بين
مختلف شرائح الشعب العراقي. والدليل على هذا التعايش أن أبناء العراق إلى
اليوم الحاضر ينتمون إلى معتقدات شتى ليست محصورة بالإسلام والمسيحية
وحداهما. كما أن العراق وريث حضارة ضاربة في القدم هي حضارة بلاد ما
بين النهرين، دجلة والفرات، ويشهد هذه الحضارة العظمى الآثار التي خلفها
السومريون والبابليون والآشوريون وسواهم من الشعوب التي عاشت في تلك
البقعة من العالم.

مع العلم أن بعض المدن العراقية مغلقة إلى حد ما لديانة أو مذهب مثل النجف
وكربلاء، فإن معظم المدن العراقية الكبرى مختلطة الأديان والمذاهب، وفي
مقدمتها بغداد والموصل والبصرة، وذلك بحكم الدور الذي أدته تلك المدن
الثلاث في تاريخ العراق منذ أيام الحقبة العباسية إلى أيام العهد العثماني. وعن
هذا الاختلاط والتجاور الديني والمذهبي كتب الرحالة ابن سعيد الأندلسي بعد
أن زار البصرة، فقال إن مستقبله كانوا من "المسلمين والنصارى والمجوس
والصابئة"، فأنشد شعراً واصفاً هذا اللقاء: قد حلها كل جود / وأمها كل
ملة. وقد تحمّل العراقيون بأديانهم ومذاهبهم الفواجع التي أعظمها غزو التتار
لبغداد، فقبل: "حُرِبَ بَغْدَادُ الْخَرَابِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَأُحْرِقَتْ كَتَبُ الْعِلْمِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ
مِنْ سَائِرِ الْعُلُومِ وَالْفُنُونِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ فِي الدُّنْيَا؛ قِيلَ إِنَّهُمْ بَنَوْا بِهَا (بِالْكَتَبِ)
جِسْرًا مِنَ الطِّينِ وَالْمَاءِ عَوْضًا عَنِ الْآجْرِ". ولم يستثن التتار أحدًا من عنفهم، ولم
يشفع بالمسيحيين العراقيين أن بعض زوجات الخانات التتار كن مسيحيات.
وظل التنوع الديني والمذهبي هو السمة الغالبة على المجتمع العراقي، ولم يحدث
في العراق هجرة جماعية قبل هجرة اليهود العراقيين عامي 1950 و1951
إلى فلسطين المحتلة مما صب في مصلحة الدولة اليهودية الناشئة.

من أقدم الديانات التي ما زالت حاضرة على الأراضي العراقية نذكر الصابئة
المنذيين. والصابئة هم أهل الدين الوحيد الذين يزعمون أن كتابهم المقدس
"الكتاربا" قد أنزله الله على آدم أبي البشر. أما الديانة الإيزيدية التي
استهدفها التفجيرات وهاجر العديد من أبنائها مناطقهم فهي امتداد لأديان
ضاربة بالقدم ومنها الزرادشتية. وهي تقول يلهين للخير والشّر تبغي عبادتهما.
ويذكر بين الفرق الإسلامية المذهب البهائي الذي بدأ فرعاً من فروع الشيعة
وانتهى إلى ديانة جديدة منفصلة عن الإسلام تعتقد بظهور المهدي المنتظر (لدى
الشيعة) بشخص السيد علي محمد الشيرازي ثم إعلان النبوة والتبشير بهاء
الله.

من النافل القول إن الدين الذي يعتنقه غالبية أهل العراق هو دين الإسلام بكل
مذاهبه وفرقه. وأكثرية مسلمي العراق هم من الشيعة الاثني عشرية التابعين
للمذهب الجعفري. أما تكوينات السنة فثلاثة هي المذهب الحنفي والشافعي
والحنبلي. وثمة في العراق فرق صوفية ولا سيما الطريقة النقشبندية والطريقة
القادرية. وشهدت العراق موقعة كربلاء التي ذهب ضحيتها الحسين بن علي
بن أبي طالب والعشرات من أقاربه وأصحابه في يوم عاشوراء، أما في النجف
فيوجد مرقد علي. ولا ننسى أن بغداد كانت عاصمة العالم الإسلامي طوال
الحقبة العباسية حيث كان مقر الخلافة. فلا يمكن فهم التراث الإسلامي من
دون دراسة تاريخ العراق ضمن التاريخ الإسلامي العام.

أما المسيحية في العراق فعمرها من عمر الكنيسة الأولى فقد وصلها وعبر فيها
الرسول الأولون المسافرون إلى الهند والشرق الأقصى. والمسيحيون العراقيون
اليوم ينتمون إلى الطوائف المسيحية كافة النسطورية (الكنيسة الآشورية)
والسريانية والكاثوليكية (الكنيسة الكلدانية المتحدة برومة) والأرثوذكسية.
وشارك المسيحيون العراقيون منذ القديم في بناء الحضارة فكان منهم المترجمون
والأطباء وعلماء الفلك والشعراء والفلاسفة. وقدم المسيحيون العراقيون
القديسين والنسك والرهبان، ونذكر منهم القديس إسحق السرياني. وقد
ساهم بعض العراقيين في أهم المحاورات والمجادلات اللاهوتية التي تمت مع
المسلمين، ومنهم طيموثاوس الجاثليق بطريرك بغداد للسناطرة، وعمار
البصري، والفيلسوف يحيى بن عدي التكريتي، وأبو رانطة التكريتي، واللاهوتي
الأرثوذكسي تاودورس أبو قرة أسقف مدينة حران.

اليوم يجري القضاء على هذا العراق المتنوع وتقسيمة إلى كيانات مذهبية
خالصة. لذلك يجري تطهير بعض المناطق ومنها الموصل التي تضم عدداً لا
يستهان به من المسيحيين. وقد هجر الكثير منهم مع غيرهم من مسيحيي
العراق بيوتهم وكنائسهم ومناطقهم إلى المهاجر البعيدة وإلى بعض الدول
الجاورة، مع العلم أن المسيحيين لم يقاتلوا أحداً من العراقيين ولا حملوا السلاح
في وجه أي من أبناء وطنهم. ومع ذلك يتم تدفيعهم ثمن الاحتلالات والتخلف
الديني والاجتماعي الذي يسود بلادهم. رجاؤنا وصلاتنا ألا يفرغ العراق من
مسيحييه كما فرغت دول كثيرة من مسيحييها. أعان الله أهل العراق.

أخبار الكنيسة

الشفاء العاجل

صلواتنا الحارة للأحباء: شاديا الخوري وأيوب موآل وزاكي الزبيق
وشوقي أبو حيدر، سائلين الرب يسوع أن يشفيهم من أمراضهم.
نرجو لهم الشفاء العاجل.

قداس وجناز

الأحد القادم في 23 تشرين الثاني، الساعة العاشرة والنصف صباحاً،
يقام قداس وجناز الأربعين لراحة نفس المرحوم عصام الصفدي من
بلدة راشيا الفخار، جنوب لبنان. تعازينا القلبية إلى زوجة المرحوم
روزات وأولاده وشقيقه وعائلاتهم. رحمه الله.