

Ephesians 3: The Universal Call, The Fatherhood of God, Knowing God's Love

Mother of God Community

December 15, 2019

Rick McKinney

There appears to me to be three general themes in Ephesians 3 – the universal call of all believers in Christ, the loving fatherhood of God, and knowing God's love personally and powerfully.

We Christians, who are mostly of Gentile origin, often take for granted what to our brother, Saint Paul, was an extremely great revelation and mystery as he writes in verses 5 and 6, the following:

⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

God fearing Jews at the time thought that Yahweh, was their God and that they were God's exclusive people. To be part of God's people, they thought, required circumcision and strict obedience to the law. Plus being part of God's people, God's family, also meant sharing in the family's inheritance.

To some degree this view is still held by many Jews today. For instance, not long ago, a close Jewish work colleague of mine asked me if it was true that Saint Peter, not Jesus, was the one who first promoted the idea that Gentiles could be part of God's people. When I told her that, in a certain sense, that that was true, she did not want to hear me explain how Peter was remarkably led by the Holy Spirit to baptize the first Gentile, Cornelius and his household and how he had to explain why he did what he did to other Jews, or how, while on earth, Jesus interacted with quite a few Gentiles and often highly commended their faith, such as the centurion who asked only that Jesus say the word for the healing of his beloved servant, for he did not feel worthy for Jesus to come under his roof. Matthew's gospel then relates:

¹⁰When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 8:10-11)

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And of course at the end of Matthew's Gospel is the instruction by Jesus to "go and make disciples of all nations." (Mt 28:10).

This universal call is also in the Old Covenants as we Christians believe that what was hidden in the Old Testament is now fully revealed in the New and we listen throughout the season of Advent from the readings of the Old Testament that proclaim how Israel is to be a light to the nations and all are to come rejoicing in the everlasting reign of the king from David's lineage.

Catholic theologian and former Protestant pastor, Scott Hahn with Jeff Cavins, describe how God's relationship with His people evolved gradually in an expanding relationship of covenants including: One Holy Family (the Noahic Covenant), One Holy Tribe (the Abrahamic Covenant), One Holy Nation (the Mosaic Covenant), One Holy Kingdom (the Davidic Covenant) and finally One Holy Catholic or universal Church (the New Covenant in Christ). The revelation and mystery is that God the Father's love is universal and He calls to all human beings to be adopted in Christ as His beloved children and excludes no one from that call, even those who historically seemed or seem to be on the periphery of human society, be they the poor, the sick, the elderly, the mentally infirmed, the slaves in bondage, the native aborigines on various continents, the homeless, those in prison, or the those still in their mother's wombs. No human being is excluded from the image and likeness that God has imprinted upon them and all are of great value to Him and He desires all to come to know Him in Christ Jesus.

Saint Paul goes on to say in verse 10 the purpose of this mystery:

¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

In the wisdom of God, the church is God's secret masterpiece, His family, which was not only finally made manifest to God's people, the Jews, but to the invisible angelic authorities (holy and perhaps unholy) in the heavenly places. And we, the

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members of God's family, manifest this divine mystery by the way we live and the words we speak.

Now we transition to the second great theme in Ephesians 3, the loving Fatherhood of God, as we read in verses 14 and 15:

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

"For this reason" refers to the previous verses on the mystery of God's church and the universality and inclusiveness of God's love. And it is Jesus who reveals God as Father or Abba, Daddy. Jesus taught us to pray to God as "Our Father" and after the resurrection he tells Mary Madeleine, "go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'."

God is Father. Unlike mothers, fathers, by nature, transcend the biological process of pregnancy and giving birth. Some fathers do not just transcend the process but are rather transient and may not even know they are fathers to certain individuals. But a good father "chooses" to be immanently and intimately involved with his family and his children and to lay down his life for them. In like manner, God, who is transcendent, "chooses" to be immanently and intimately involved in his beloved family, human creatures made in His image and likeness, yes, but more especially the members of the body of Christ, the church, even to the laying down of His life.

When I first became a father, my daughter Joann was born with an inherited blood disorder and before her mother or I were allowed to hold her she was quickly taken away by ambulance to Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. When I went to that hospital and was able to hold my daughter for the first time I tearfully told her that I was her father and that I couldn't always be with her but that she had another father, a heavenly Father, who would always be with her and would never leave her. She was baptized in that hospital by Father Tom Weinandy and later recovered after a second blood transfusion which was being exchanged in her little body while

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Mass was being said on her behalf. I and others felt during that time that the blood of Jesus was in some sense replacing her own blood.

God the Father wants us to know personally and experientially His freely given love in Christ Jesus which is the third theme as related by Saint Paul in verses 18 and 19:

¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Some of us here have experientially tasted of this surpassing love and power when we were prayed with to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Others may have had a glimpse of this as we praise God together here or at Mass or as you have bowed before His presence in private adoration. In any case know that God deeply desires for us to know his love, the love of a father who gave up his only begotten son, the love of The Father.

Saint Paul says that to really know the love of Christ is to be filled with all the fullness of God. Few of us on this side of the grave can really say that fully. But some of you knew Bill Varrieur, a tireless servant at the church across the street, and who directed the annual children and youth Passion play. When in 2010 he was dying of cancer, and had all kinds of tubes attached to his body, he told his amazed pastor who was visiting him, "Father, I am so happy. I love everybody." I think that Bill, especially at the end of his life, knew something of the fullness of God's love, which radiates in loving others.

We individually and as members of God's church are stewards of the grace and mystery of Christ. Every one of us who knows Jesus is being formed by the Holy Spirit into Christ and is being used for His purposes. Our prayer, like Mary's, ought to be, "I am the servant of the Lord (and God's child), be it done to me (and through me) according to your word. If we are willing, Christ will have His way working in us and through us, and we will all come know the fullness of God's love

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and be filled to the brim, even if we, as vessels, are perhaps oddly shaped or small in capacity. Still, we can be filled to the brim, for as Saint Paul concludes in verses 20 and 21.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The word power in this passage is the Greek word, dynamis, from whence comes our English word, dynamite, and we know that dynamite is explosive in its power. But dynamite was also used extensively and carefully in forming Mount Rushmore so as to cut away that which was unnecessary and thus form the giant images that we see there today. We too are being formed with power into an image, the image of Christ and by his power working in us we too can be used by Christ, just as Saint Paul was, in powerful ways within His, body, the church, and accomplish things in Christ and become the kind of persons in Christ which are beyond our imagination.

Thank you.

Questions to ponder:

- 1) Do I know that I am a full member in the kingdom of Christ and have I written off any one as being beyond help for coming into that kingdom?
- 2) Do I truly know that God the Father loves me as His own beloved child?
- 3) How fully have I grasped on wide and long and deep is the love of Christ and do I really desire to know that love and to believe that I can be made more fully like Him and be used powerfully by Him in his beloved body, the church?