Carême IV 2014

“Laetare, Jerusalem!” (*Introit*, Is. 66:10)

The Divine Liturgy this morning plays upon the tensions between heaven and earth; the Jerusalem above, and the Jerusalem below; joy, and sadness. We find these tensions present also in the midst of our own lives, wherein (as the Collect says) “we are justly afflicted” because of our own conduct, yet all the while yearning “for Divine consolation.”

St. Paul finds this same tension in his allegorical reading of the history of the Patriarchs. We all know the story well: that a son was promised to Abram, but because of his lack of faith, he hearkened to the voice of his wife Sara, took the bondwoman Hagar, and begot a son of his own making, Ishmael. Like the Tower of Babel, Ishmael is a type, a symbol of the work of man proceeding by his own lights, seeking to be a law unto himself. Sadly, it would be only to easy to provide a catalog of manifest sins against nature in our own day, sins which cry out to heaven like the blood of righteous Abel. Following the allegory of St. Paul, however, we are forced to admit that we, too, are *natural* sons of Ishmael—we, too, are born into slavery and bondage, fettered with the chains of the sin of Adam. We, too, have a law within us—our fallen human nature—which strives against the law of God. And when we follow our own will, rather than the will of God, we make ourselves slaves of the bondwoman, Hagar.

“But we are sons, *not* of the bondwoman, but of the freewoman.” But how is this? “Christ hath delivered us.” Although we are sons of Adam by nature, we are sons of God by adoption—our adoption into the Life, Death, and Resurrection of the Son of the Promise, Jesus Christ. This teaching is a scandal to many, both then and now. Secular Man is scandalized to hear that what he is by nature, by his own effort, is insufficient to produce true Life. False religions are scandalized to hear that Jesus Christ alone is the Son of the Promise, and that only His heirs shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, the Promised Land, the true Jerusalem. And we, like St. Peter, are scandalized when the Son of the Promise takes hold of the beams of His Cross, and bids us do likewise.

During this final week of Lent and Passiontide, let us “take hold, and not let go” [*tenui nec dimittam*] (Cant. 3:4) of the Cross—let us be faithful to our discipline of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, confident that Calvary is only the “day” of this life below, beyond which stretches the new and unending Day of the Resurrection, the Joy of the fullness of Life with God and His Saints forever. Amen!