

AN OFFER OF POWER

"...by which...you may...become partakers of the divine nature." II Peter 1:3,4

For a long time I have had a picture in my study ~~of~~ which is a reproduction of an etching by DeMartelly called "Give us this day." There are two women and a girl seated on benches at a rough table. The room is quite bare and even harsh. There are empty plates in front of each woman and one dish in which there is some food. The door is open and we look out to the fields which are rich. Sunlight streams through the door and through a window in the rear. An older woman whose face is thin and drawn is looking in the dish. The young woman seems to be saying grace and her head is lifted. The ~~third~~ woman sits with her back to us and shawl hides her head. I keep wishing that she would turn so that I might see her face. They tell us the artist has achieved a technical triumph in his treatment of the sunlight that fills the room. But more than that he has communicated to us a world wide sympathy for the poor, for those who toil, for all people. When I am writing a sermon I like to look at that picture--sometimes when I am telephoning I look at it--very often I look at it when I am tempted to forget people.

The church must always keep us aware that in our world there is need, there is suffering, there is trouble, there is work to do and there are loads to lift. Let us never become so engrossed in theological speculation or in mystical rapture or in good fellowship that we forget our world. The church must stir us to action and it must challenge us to do something about our world. It will be a sad day when the Christian church fails to arouse people to the call of duty or the call of need. Our church and its people should be forever in the forefront, leading every good cause to make our world a better world.

Frankly I have neither the strength nor the resources to deal with our world alone. Nor do you have the strength to deal with these things. We need to remember that Christianity offers us power as well as problems. W. A. Smart writes in "The Spiritual Gospel"--"(Christianity can never consist merely in doing things, even very good things. It dares us to believe that the God who was in Christ can be in us also." In the 2nd Letter of Peter we find the words "...by which... you may... become partakers of the divine nature."

Paul has the same idea and his statement about temptation may be applied also to responsibility. He wrote to the Corinthians: "NO TEMPTATION HAS OVERTAKEN YOU THAT IS NOT COMMON TO MAN. GOD IS FAITHFUL, AND HE WILL NOT LET YOU BE TEMPTED BEYOND YOUR STRENGTH, BUT WITH THE TEMPTATION WILL ALSO PROVIDE THE WAY OF ESCAPE, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO ENDURE IT." We may paraphrase that: "GOD IS FAITHFUL, AND HE WILL NOT GIVE YOU RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND YOUR STRENGTH, BUT WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY WILL ALSO PROVIDE THE POWER TO MEET IT. That has been the shouting faith of countless generations of Christians.

In a few moments the Prayer of Consecration will be said, in which will be heard these words which include the text from 2nd Peter: "AND GRANT THAT WE, RECEIVING THIS BREAD AND WINE, ACCORDING TO THY SON, OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST'S HOLY INSTITUTION, IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIS DEATH AND PASSION, MAY ALSO BE PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE THROUGH HIM..." This communion is the symbol of the fact that we may become new people through Christ. J. B. Phillips translates our text: "IT IS THROUGH HIM THAT GOD'S GREATEST AND MOST PRECIOUS PROMISES HAVE BECOME AVAILABLE TO US MEN..." He head this paragraph: "GOD HAS DONE HIS PART: SEE THAT YOU DO YOURS." Here is an offer of power, the like of which the world has never seen.

Do you feel that you cannot face the responsibilities of this week? Then come and receive these symbols of new life. Do you feel that our world has problems which can never be solved? Then you need to come and find here the strength which is promised to those who would help bear the burden of the world. Whatever burden you have brought with you into this church this morning you may bring with you to this communion. You will carry the burden away, but you will find that you have new strength to bear it.

As we kneel and join together in this sacrament let us then open our lives that the divine may enter. Let us bring our sins, our troubles, our weaknesses. Then let us leave this table conscious of forgiveness and of new strength -- singing in our hearts: "Glory be to God on high", for YOU may become partakers of the divine nature."