

MANY GIFTS, ONE CHURCH

1Corinthians 12:23 *And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.*

We all know that Jacob had 12 sons that they form the 12 tribes of Israel. When God spoke to Pharaoh, he said, “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn. And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn. (Exodus 4:22, 23). God spoke, not of 12 sons, but one son, Israel. Just as 6000 demons spoke with one voice and one name, “Legion”, God spoke of 2 million souls as one, and with one name, Israel. Can we say together that we are the Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ! We may be in London, Oslo, Stockholm, Zurich, Washington, etc. but let us proclaim loud and clear to the Devil: we are one church in Jesus name.

The mothers of the 12 sons of Jacob clearly did not have this revelation. There seemed to exist what one can call a “war of wombs” between them. Leah, as we know, was very sad that Jacob loved Rachel and not her. So she transferred the war with Rachel to her womb. “And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me” (Genesis 29:32). Reuben means “behold a son”. The Bible says, “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” (Psalm 127:3), but for Leah, Reuben was not just a gift for the church but a weapon to get back the favor of Jacob and avenge herself of Rachel. May God help us! What gifts do we have in the church? Let us celebrate and say they all from Jesus, of Jesus and for Jesus! Amen! We will never use gifts as weapons against our brothers or sisters. We see that such an attitude did not bless Leah; she was still bitter.

Genesis 29:33 *And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.*

The gifts became about her – she was fixated about her suffering and became self-obsessed. Simeon means “God heard”. God was giving gifts to the church, but Leah thought it was about herself. May God help our attitudes in the church! Let us say together that Reuben is for the church and Simeon is also for the church; it is not about my problem with Rachel or anyone. Instead of being angry at her father, Laban, she was angry at poor Rachel, her own

sister. Have we become jealous of our own brothers or sisters in the church – may God deliver us today! The “war of the wombs” continued: “And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi” (Genesis 29:34). Even the future priest, Levi, did not escape the poison. Levi is God’s gift to the church; they are the ministers of God for reconciliation with him; not to be joined together with your husband or wife, dear Leah – God bless her soul! If our heart is not right with the Lord, we will misinterpret the gift of God! But see the mercy of God – he kept giving his gifts despite the misinterpretation of his gifts. God was not just thinking of Leah, but his firstborn, Israel. But the sisters did not stop comparing wombs, pregnancies etc. I wonder about women (some sister please help me)! Do you compare the sizes of your stomachs, the weight of the children and such things? Just joking! We are not yet finished with Leah.

Genesis 29:35 *And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.*

How many gifts must God give us before we praise him? Notice, only when she praised God did she stop giving birth. It’s as if God was saying, “Are you still angry and bitter? I love you dearly Leah and, although your attitude is not right, I will give you more gifts until you praise me.” Glory to the God of gifts, Jesus Christ! God continued to give children which represent gifts in the church. We know that Rachel wanted to die if she did not get children; and God gave her Dan through Bilhah, her maid. “And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan” (Gen 30:6). We need good judgement in the church (wisdom). Then Bilhah bore Naphtali which means “wrestling”. She was wrestling with her sister but God was giving spiritual wrestlers to the church. Then Zilpah, Leah’s maid, gave birth to Gad which means “a troop cometh” (Gen 30:11). Now she was going military on her sister – next is nuclear. Bishop Ayele was talking about an army God was raising in the church – let us say together “Gad is coming – a troop/army is coming to the church”. Why would one person need an army? Gad is for the church.

Let us go more quickly through the list: Asher means happy. Don’t you want to see the happy brother or sister in the church – the one who has this wonderful gift of encouraging and making you smile and laugh in Jesus? Jesus give us more Ashers! But let me jump straight to the last two sons – Joseph and Benjamin. We know the story well. Following our interpretation today, we can say that 10 gifts in the church (Benjamin was too small) decided

to kick out one gift that they found intolerable – Joseph. Could it be that the spirit of the mothers affected the spirit of the brothers? Basically they decided the church is better off without this one gift called Joseph. Saints of God, is there a gift we feel we don't need in the church? Please be careful! We know that Joseph's mother, Rachel, died when giving birth to youngest son, Benjamin. Here God was giving a sign to the church: just as God saved Israel through the son of the mother who died, God saved the church through his own Son who died – Jesus Christ. The rejected and banished son became the savior. The gift in the church that we may esteem the least, as Paul told the Corinthians, may be the one which saves the church.

Now listen to this, please! Joseph bound Simeon as a hostage in Egypt until they brought Benjamin. "Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies" (Gen 42:16). Unless we recognize, honor and use ALL THE GIFTS IN THE CHURCH, we may be kept in prison; the other gifts become useless. Joseph bound Simeon, the first gift as surety. Is Jesus not releasing the fullness of his gifts because we sold Joseph and neglected Benjamin? That day they were forced to think about Joseph and Benjamin. Can you imagine how important the least brother, Benjamin, became that day! All 10 brothers showed him newfound attention; they became obsessed with Benjamin. They must have surrounded him like soldiers and were ready to die for Benjamin along the way. One for all and all for one was their motto. God has amazing ways of bringing unity in the church. Revival begins with unity: they acknowledged their sin and repented. "And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (Gen 42:21).

Finally, not the entire family of Joseph bowed down to Joseph: the gift that was sold and neglected. Let us bow down to one another now out of love so God will not force us as he did the brothers of Joseph. Each brother and sister is a gift from God and must be honored – especially the least ones.

Phil 2:3 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

I began by speaking about the war of wombs. Let me finish by exhorting us to engage in a war to esteem the others better than ourselves. Let us recognize Benjamin today, let us not sell Joseph. Let us rejoice in every gift that Jesus has given the Apostolic Church. Amen!