

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ  
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros  
to the Parish of St. Ambelain  
on Sunday, January 3, 2016*

YEAR C - SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Hello brethren, and welcome. In preparing today's homily I was reviewing the homily delivered to you this time last year, concerning the nature & roles of the psychic & pneumatic church, and how the principles of grace & truth apply to them. Now, this is a topic that we have discussed frequently, whether in our homilies, or our other discourses, or among ourselves privately. Therefore, I don't feel that we need to spend time on that topic today, except to bring it to your recollection. Keeping in mind the nature and aims of the psychic church & the pneumatic church, and being able to distinguish which is being referred to in scripture, will go a long way towards reconciling otherwise seemingly contradictory messages.

Right now, though, we want to consider the concept of Election, which has been mentioned in passing in some of our recent homilies. This concept of Election is tied inextricably to the doctrine of predestination, discussed in today's Epistle reading. This reading mentions it not once but twice, suggesting that it is something we should look at very seriously, even if it is uncomfortable for us to do so.

The concepts of Election & predestination, or rather the misunderstanding of these concepts, have led many to adopt some extreme positions. On the one side we see those who are all too eager to espouse an elitist and excusatory doctrine. And we are not speaking here of just zealous Calvinists, but within the very ranks of the Gnostic ecclesia. This doctrine is appealing to those who are insecure and who lack an inner locus of identity. What I mean by that is that if one's sense of identity and self-worth is not firmly rooted within the very depths of oneself, then one is constantly - whether consciously or not - comparing and judging oneself according to external influences. This is called an external locus of identity. This can lead to the false inflation of ego in order to constantly remind oneself that he or she is "better" than those around them. The idea of a predestined election is therefore popular to this type because it is the ultimate ego boost. It no longer even matters what one has or does, because they are inherently better than everybody else. This is particularly dangerous because it gives the illusion of being self-grounded; but it is just that: an illusion. Strangely, being self-centered does not actually mean being centered within oneself.

At the other extreme we see those who have rejected the notions of Election & predestination wholesale. There are generally two possible reasons for this. The first is the (quite natural) revulsion at the sense of false entitlement just described, and the authoritarian tendencies that accompany it. The second reason is that it conflicts with the notion of free will, something our culture values highly. But both of these reflections of Election & predestination have their own problems. They can lead to a sort of anarchic egalitarianism, or a radical relativism, which not only contradicts scripture, but undermines the fundamental teachings of the Mystery Traditions.

Whenever we see such extremes, red flags should be going up. Extremism is an indicator of an imbalance, a lack of equilibrium, a half-truth. How then can we reconcile predestination with free will? The only way is to admit that both are mitigated, that neither is absolute. Are we predestined "to sonship through Jesus Christ"? Yes, undoubtedly. But we also have the choice of whether we claim that inheritance. We are told that we are "predestined according to the plan of the one working all things..." The key word here is plan. We are each part of the divine plan of reintegration. But while the plan is perfect in the Pleroma, it becomes subject to corruption in the sublunary realm. Sometimes our life will follow this plan naturally, guided by Providence alone. Other times our will (which is only partially free) will set us off course; but it is this very same will that allows for the plan's ultimate fulfillment.