

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on Wednesday, February 14, 2018*

YEAR B - ASH WEDNESDAY

Welcome, everybody, to our special Ash Wednesday celebration. Today marks the beginning of our Lenten Season, in preparation for the Paschal celebration. It also happens to be Valentine's Day, which, in the ACP, we dedicate to the great doctor of the gnosis, Valentinus. Recognized by many Gnostics as a Saint, Valentinus was a keen student of Christian theology who masterfully wedded and reconciled many points of Gnostic and orthodox theology. While his doctrines were genuinely Gnostic, through and through, he was able to teach them within the broader Church. It is reported by Tertullian that he was so popular that he was nearly elected Bishop of Rome - the office known today as the Pope. This was, of course, in a different era of the Church; at a time, in the mid-second century, when the Church had no formal canon or hard-and-fast orthodoxy, so to speak. The scriptural texts that were utilized varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The Church of this era was rich in the faith in the sacraments, and in the belief of the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church and provide continuing revelations.

The spirit of the Valentinian movement seems very similar to me, in many ways, to that of Paul some hundred years - give or take - earlier. In Paul's letters, such as today's reading from 2 Corinthians, we can still today sense the Holy Spirit which is inspiring his words. His words are a call to action; an exhortation to put doubt aside, along with every other excuse, and do the work of God. Paul makes it clear that our condition in life is to in no wise prevent the carrying out of our ministry: "in afflictions, in hardships, in distress, in beatings, in imprisonment, in riots, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fasting...in honor and in dishonor, in ill repute and good repute; though to be deceivers, yet being true..." etc., etc. And he further tells us that it is to be accomplished "by purity, gnosis, patience, and kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in perfect Agape, in the word of Truth, in the power of God." And he tells us, finally, that we are to make use of all means available to us: "through the weapons of righteousness of the right and of the left."

All of this is very much in the spirit of the early Gnostics. Valentinus builds off of many of the themes and concepts introduced by Paul in his writings. Just this past Sunday we read of Paul's reference to the "god of this aeon." And we have read often Paul's writings concerning the old law. These are some of the theological concepts that form the very foundation of Gnostic philosophy. Valentinus was particularly clever in that he did not seem to take extreme positions, but rather sought to reconcile the Gnostic and proto-orthodox doctrines. For example, the demiurge is not outright "evil," but imperfect; the Mosaic law is not "wrong," but incomplete, etc. He did not compromise the goodness and perfection of the true God of Light, but he did open the door to a broader understanding of scripture.