

Readings for June 10th – Ephrem of Nisibis

68:11- 18 *Exsurgat Deus*

11 The Lord gave the word; *
great was the company of women who bore the tidings:

12 "Kings with their armies are fleeing away; *
the women at home are dividing the spoils."

13 Though you lingered among the sheepfolds, *
you shall be like a dove whose wings are covered with silver,
whose feathers are like green gold.

14 When the Almighty scattered kings, *
it was like snow falling in Zalmon.

15 O mighty mountain, O hill of Bashan! *
O rugged mountain, O hill of Bashan!

16 Why do you look with envy, O rugged mountain,
at the hill which God chose for his resting place? *
truly, the Lord will dwell there for ever.

17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand,
even thousands of thousands; *
the Lord comes in holiness from Sinai.

18 You have gone up on high and led captivity captive;
you have received gifts even from your enemies, *
that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit *
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.

Job 38:1-11

¹ Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

² 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³ Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

⁴ 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?
6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings* shouted for joy?

8 'Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb?—
9 when I made the clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
11 and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped"?

Mark 9:38-41

38 John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone* casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' 39 But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. 40 Whoever is not against us is for us. 41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.'

EPHREM OF NISIBIS, DEACON AND HYMN-WRITER (10 JUNE 373)

Ephrem of Nisibis was a teacher, poet, orator, and defender of the faith, and the foremost Christian theologian who wrote in the Syriac language. The Syrians called him "The Harp of the Holy Spirit," and his hymns still enrich the liturgies of the Syriac churches. Ephrem was one whose writings were influential in the development of Christian doctrine. Jerome writes: "I have read in Greek a volume of his on the Holy Spirit, and though it was only a translation, I recognized therein the sublime genius of the man."

Ephrem was born at Nisibis in Mesopotamia. At eighteen, he was baptized by James, Bishop of Nisibis. It is believed that Ephrem accompanied James to the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 and served as his secretary, deacon, and theological assistant. He lived at Nisibis until 363, when the Persians captured the city and drove out the Christians.

Ephrem retired to a cave in the hills above the city of Edessa. There he wrote most of his spiritual works. Discovering that hymns could be of great value in support of the Christian faith, he opposed Gnostic hymns with his own, sung by choirs of women. An example is "From God



Christ's deity came forth" (*The Hymnal 1982*, #443). This establishment of female choirs gave an important liturgical role to women within the early Syriac church, and the strong theological content of the hymns meant that women were also being educated in theology. Catechizing women was considered to be the most effective way of teaching the faith because of the influence that they would likely have on their children. Therefore, women's education was a high priority.

Ephrem's homilies and poems often employ vivid and memorable imagery. In describing the death and resurrection of Christ in his *Homily on Our Lord*, he wrote: "When Death came confidently as usual, to feed on mortal fruit, Life, the killer of Death, was lying in wait . . . Because of one thing which it could not eat, Death had to give back everything inside that it had eaten, for when a person's stomach is upset, he vomits out what had agreed with him as well as what disagrees with him. Thus Death's stomach became upset, and when it vomited out the Medicine of Life which had soured it, it vomited out with Him all those whom it had been pleased to swallow."

During a famine in 372–373, Ephrem distributed food and money to the poor and organized a sort of ambulance service for the sick. He died of exhaustion, brought on by his long hours of relief work. Of his writings, there remain dozens of poems and hymns,

commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, and numerous homilies. In his commentary on the Passion, he wrote: "No one has seen or shall see the things which you have seen. The Lord himself has become the altar, priest, and bread, and the chalice of salvation. He alone suffices for all, yet none suffices for him. He is Altar and Lamb, victim and sacrifice, priest as well as food."

THE PRAYER OF ST EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

O Lord and Master of my life, do not give me the spirit of laziness, meddling, self-importance and idle talk. (prostration)

Instead, grace me, Your servant, with the spirit of modesty, humility, patience, and love. (prostration)

Indeed, my Lord and King, grant that I may see my own faults, and not condemn my brothers and sisters, for You are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen. (prostration)

(Twelve deep bows, saying each time: O God, be gracious to me, a sinner.)

[Translation by Fr James Silver, Drew University; posted on the Orthodox list]