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The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order

The 2nd Sunday of Zemene Tsom (*The Season of Lent*)

Liturgical Readings:

Thes. 4:1– 13; 1 Pet 1: 13-end; Acts 10: 7 - 30

Psalm 96:5-6;

Mat. 6:16-25

The Anaphora of Saint Epiphanius

Holiness

"For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary." "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance... No man can serve two masters: ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Beloved in Christ,

Grace and peace be unto you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, the Holy Scriptures invite us to reflect upon two profound truths: the incomparable majesty of our God, and the orientation of the human heart in worship, fasting, and devotion.

The psalmist declares with unwavering certainty: *"For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens."* Every creation, every power that men may exalt in place of the Almighty, is but an idol. Whether carved from wood and stone, or forged from human desire, these gods cannot create, cannot sustain, and cannot save. Only the Lord, the Creator of the heavens, possesses true authority, power, and glory.

Consider the testimony of our ancestors in the Old Testament. Upon Mount Carmel, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal. Despite their cries, their rituals, and their fervent displays, their god remained silent. The living God alone answered with fire from heaven, demonstrating unmistakably that *"the LORD made the heavens"* (1 Kings 18:20-40). Honour and majesty were manifest before Him; strength and beauty dwelt in His sanctuary. In this, we see a vivid reminder that the Lord is not only transcendent but imminently present in His holiness.

In the New Testament, this majesty is fully revealed in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He, the Word made flesh, upholds all creation, yet humbled Himself to enter our world. As St. Paul declares: *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible"* (Colossians 1:16). True honour and majesty are inseparable from holiness and righteousness. Strength and beauty are not found in human artifice, nor in worldly grandeur, but in the sanctuary of God—His Church, His temple, and the hearts of those who worship Him in spirit and truth.

From the Ethiopian Orthodox perspective, our sacred liturgy bears witness to this reality. Our tabots, crosses, and sacred vessels point to the invisible majesty of God. They are not ends in themselves; rather, they direct our hearts to the source of all creation. The beauty and strength we behold in the sanctuary reflect the divine presence, reminding us that the Lord alone is worthy of our worship.

Our Lord in Matthew 6 continues this teaching, addressing the inner life and the orientation of the heart: *“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance... No man can serve two masters: ye cannot serve God and mammon.”* Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are not to be worn as badges of piety, but practised in secret, for the Father who sees in secret rewards openly. In the Old Testament, we see the peril of divided hearts: Israel, tempted by the golden calf, turned from God to an idol (Exodus 32). Yet Daniel, steadfast in Babylon, refused the king’s food to serve the one true God (Daniel 1). The sincerity of the heart, not outward display, is honoured by God.

Saint Paul echoes this call to heavenly devotion: *“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3:2). The treasures of the heart must be laid up in heaven, not buried in worldly wealth, pride, or fleeting ambition. Our spiritual disciplines—fasting, prayer, almsgiving—are instruments to cultivate holiness, not displays of human grandeur.

Beloved faithful, let us examine our hearts today. What idols, visible or invisible, have we placed before the Creator of heaven and earth? Are we fasting to impress men, or to draw near to God? Are we serving worldly desires, or the One who alone holds the keys of heaven? In the hidden chambers of our soul, where God alone sees, the treasures of heaven are stored, and there our devotion bears eternal fruit.

As we participate in the fasts of the Church, the vigils of prayer, and the sacred offerings of our lives, let us remember: our Master is not Mammon, but the Lord of glory. Let our hearts be single, our devotion sincere, and our treasures eternal. May the Lord, who made the heavens, dwell in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. May His honour, majesty, strength, and beauty transform us, so that we may serve Him with undivided hearts and one accord, until the day we behold Him face to face in the heavenly kingdom.

Amen.