

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

The Feast of Tabernacles for the year 2002 is finished and was completely observed by the brethren here in Mindanao, Philippines. It is another season of the year in which the remnant of God's people around the world convoke at different festival sites. They remember the significance of God's master plan for mankind by solemnly observing the feast that was commanded by God to be kept forever, even by the end-time generation.

The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord . . . And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations . . . (Leviticus 23:34–41).

The first day of the feast is a holy convocation, a commanded assembly. No work is to be done. All the faithful will be gathering together for fellowship and spiritual nourishment. This festival gives us a special time and setting in which to think about God and His purpose for eternal life and how to attain it.

The Feast of Tabernacles is intended to separate and free us from the routine cares of this world, living in temporary dwellings for an entire week away from our everyday surroundings and jobs. It really pictures the universal freedom and place that will exist in the Millennium—the coming wonderful world tomorrow under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ and His saints—one thousand years of peace, prosperity, joy and abundant blessings. This festival is the picture of that Millennium.

While the Feast of Tabernacles does picture the Millennium and the joyous reign of the saints with Christ, it also represents much more. When God introduced the feast to ancient Israel, it was referred to as the feast of ingathering at the end of the harvest year (Exodus 23:16). If we examine the agricultural imagery, we realize that there are important spiritual lessons to be garnered.

Jesus Christ teaches us through the parable of the sower, that the physical labor of sowing and harvesting is an important type of the spiritual labor we must perform. There is an "agricultural" work to be done now in our lives if the knowledge—the seed—we received at the feast is to bear fruit.

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:5–15).

If the seed we have received is to produce at all, it must fall on cultivated ground instead of falling by the wayside to be gobbled up by the predators. That is to say, we must cultivate understanding. The Apostle James wrote, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given to him" (James 1:5). Psalm 119:125 says, "I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies." But merely possessing knowledge is insufficient of itself. The church of God has seen many self-proclaimed "intellectuals" come and go because they only received "head knowledge." Something more is needed to bear much good and enduring fruit.

We cannot have the stony heart of the "intellectuals," the proud, the independent or the unrepentant, that receives knowledge with joy but does not have the heart to love and obey God. (See Luke 8:13). Just as God sends rain to prepare the ground, so our hearts must be softened and prepared to receive God's seeds of knowledge.

Our hearts must be prepared and softened by all God's Word to germinate and root deep down inside. To the humbled and repentant, God promises His Spirit as the early rain, to soften the heart.

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezekiel 11:19–20).

Another "agricultural" work we must perform is to root out the weeds and thorns that would otherwise choke out the newly sprouted seeds of Truth (Luke 8:14). God uses weeds to typify the cares of the world, the pursuit of material goods and carnal pleasures because the weeds in our lives squeeze out the essential time for prayer, study and meditation. We need these "garden" tools to cultivate the fruitful fields of eternal life.

Once the ground is prepared and the weeds kept in check, then we must, with patient endurance, tend our spiritual garden. But the one that fell on the good ground is he who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keeps it and bears fruit with patience (v. 15).

In order for God to bless us with an abundant spiritual harvest of good fruit next feast, we must begin our preparations now so the seeds of truth in our lives will not die in a hard, dry, weedy plot, but instead will flourish. Now is the time to work.

If we persistently sow our seed with humility we will have cause to rejoice at harvest time.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him (Psalm 126:5-6).

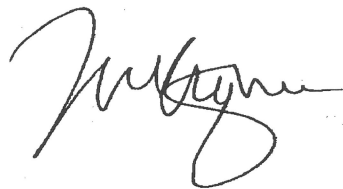
God will always provide the spiritual rain for the harvest.

Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness (Psalm 65:9-11).

Let us not forget to appreciate and perform our "agricultural" labor throughout the year, so that our harvest may be abundant at next year's Feast of Tabernacles.

With much love from Mindanao.

Your brother,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mario Y. Roque