

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD

On every New Year's Day (& eve), which we celebrate as the *Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God*, the second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians presents us 21st century folks with a semantic challenge. Paul refers to us as adopted "sons" of God by virtue of Jesus' birth. He goes on to say: "So then, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God." Well of course, that seems to leave out more than half of the human race!

In some parishes where I've served – and in many others, I'm sure – lectors on this feast day were sometimes distressed by this scripture passage. Women, especially and understandably, were inclined to change "son" to "child" or "child of God." But as tempting as that might be in order to achieve political correctness or assuage potential hurt feelings, that translation change dilutes the powerful point St. Paul (admittedly a bit of a chauvinist at times) is trying to make. And it's the historical milieu in which this letter is written that needs to be understood in order to appreciate its true message.

In Paul's time, and for many centuries and in many cultures before and after, only sons could inherit; daughters might be given a dowry in order to snare a good husband (or even a not-so-good one), but they could never be heirs. And of course, slaves were completely excluded from any kind of inheritance from anyone. So what Paul is saying is that, through Jesus, **all** God's children – men and women, slave and free, Jew and Greek – have been given the dignity that in his day only a son could hope to enjoy. Rather than being *exclusive*, Paul is being radically *inclusive*, and he should probably have been grateful that he wasn't stoned to death for his cultural heresy.

So here we are today, God having sent "the Spirit of his Son into our hearts", giving us the privilege of "crying out, 'Abba, Father!'", with "Abba" being the equivalent of "Daddy" or "Papa." We are all heirs of that immense dignity and of a profoundly intimate relationship with our God. What a wonderful truth to ponder as we begin a new year of grace!

Fr. Bob