



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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In the Midst of Changes and Chances

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

During times of turmoil, I often find myself turning to the early Church for their witness. The early Christians found ways to grow in their faith and hope in Jesus, even as they faced persecution, illness, rejection by family and friends, and were often isolated from their sister and brother Christians. It was a difficult time to be the Church, and yet, the Church grew and prospered.

Let us turn to the example of Saint Macrina, whose Feast Day is July 19th. Macrina may not be the most famous saint, but her life is a remarkable example of strength for us today.

Macrina was born in 327 A.D. in Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey. At the age of 12, she was engaged to be married. However, when her fiancé died, instead of looking to find another husband, she decided to remain unmarried and dedicate her life to Christ.

People often know Macrina as the older sister of Saint Basil and Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Many read the writings of Basil and Gregory, but they may not consider the influence their sister had on them. Macrina helped her mother raise and educate her younger brothers, and her ascetic lifestyle had great influence on them. Her brother Gregory wrote that when their brother Basil returned from advanced studies, he was acting self-important, and it was Macrina who helped Basil embrace humility and become a monk.

When her father died, Macrina took her mother to a family estate, and there Macrina founded a monastic community. Through all the ups and downs of her personal life and in the world around her, Macrina stayed grounded in Scripture, prayer, and a simple way of living in community. She died on the family estate in 379 and entered into the ever-nearer presence of the Lord.

Monastics have always been appealing to me. I think what is so interesting to me is the focus and “groundedness” into which they live. As I reflect on the life of Macrina, I see her steadfast sense of purpose. She did not have an easy life by any stretch, and I am certain she knew of the issues going on in the world around her. Yet, the way that she continued to grow in faith and hope and strength was by staying focused on the Lord, even in the midst of the transitions and struggles in her life.

As a society, we often find ourselves distracted, moving from one thing to the next, one topic to another, with little focus. When we see the magnitude of all the issues swirling around us, it can be overwhelming and exhausting at times. I often find myself saying, “I can’t do it all. I don’t even know where to start!” I feel frozen in place.

The good news is that we are not expected to do it all. We are not expected to be the savior. There is only one of those, and his name is Jesus Christ. We *are* expected to be faithful to Him, making decisions big and small that demonstrate the sacrificial love of God to our neighbor. We will fall short again and again, but we are called to return again and again to the Lord.

When we turn to the Holy Scriptures and to prayer and listen to the Holy Spirit, we become grounded, centered, refocused on God. We are better able to respond to those people and things around us when we are nourished and centered on God.

One of my favorite prayers comes from Compline, and I think it is especially helpful now. It reads:

“Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Hear these words today, pray them, and let them sink in. We have much we can learn from the faithful in the early Church, like Saint Macrina. When we are centered on God, no matter the changes and chances of this life, we continue in faith and hope.