

May 21, 2006

The Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

An apologetic consideration of the Lord's Resurrection leads logically to the subject of Ecclesiology, the institution of the Twelve being the link between the two subjects. We know about the Resurrection, after all, from the testimony of witnesses, and the Church from the beginning was formed and structured around the testimony and authority of specific men who were the appointed witnesses of the risen Jesus. These men were originally known simply as "the Twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5; John 6:67; 20:24)

Certainly the Lord appeared to others besides these Twelve (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:5-8; Matthew 28:9; Mark 16:9-12; Luke 24:13-35; John 20:11-18). Nonetheless, each of the four Gospels concentrates attention on a specific revelation to the Twelve (or, more precisely, the Eleven, because of the recent defection), a revelation in which the risen Lord commissioned these men with particular authority as His appointed witnesses (Matthew 28:16-19; Mark 16:14-15; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; 21:15-17). Although the four Evangelists differ greatly among themselves with respect to the details of this revelation--and even the locale where it took place--the fact of the apostolic revelation is the same in each account, and each contains some form of the Great Commission.

This means that the authority of these Twelve is in every case related to their qualifications to testify to the factual truth of the Resurrection. The four Evangelists, in varying ways and in accord with the local traditions on which they rely, bear witness to that common apostolic authority. By reason of a special commission given by the risen Jesus Himself, those Twelve formed a corporate, cohesive unit of apostolic authority in the Church.

Indeed, their number itself was deemed important to the Church's foundation. When the Twelve were reduced to Eleven because of the defection of Judas, they promptly provided for another man to take his place, prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit. It is worth reviewing the conditions on which that choice was based: "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and

out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become *a witness with us of His resurrection*" (Acts 1:21-22).

When God's choice fell on Matthias, therefore, "he was *numbered with the Eleven Apostles*" (1:26). Chosen from a larger group of those who had seen the risen Jesus, Matthias was now officially taken into, "numbered with," this distinct body of authorized witnesses. This was not an individual but a corporate calling. Matthias became a "witness" to the Resurrection "with" them. To these Twelve, all of them chosen by God, was entrusted a special authority to speak to and for the Church, particularly with respect to the Resurrection.

The Apostles themselves did not select Matthias. He was not voted on. He was chosen, says the Sacred Text, by "lot." Indeed, the Greek word for "lot" here is *kleros*, and it is worth noting that this is the root of the word "clergy." Matthias became, rather literally, a "clergyman," a man selected by lot.

The ministry of the men thus chosen as authoritative witnesses was rooted in the Lord's Resurrection. This truth is perhaps clearest in Matthew's version of the Great Commission, where Jesus begins by declaring, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." It is in virtue of that authority that Jesus then directs this select group of men, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:18-19).

The important link word of this passage is "therefore." That is to say, the mission of the Twelve is the proper inference drawn from the premise of the authority and glorification of Jesus by virtue of the Resurrection. The office and ministry of apostolicity is inseparable from, and totally depends on, the Resurrection of Christ. The apostolic authority in the Church was founded on the Resurrection as on a validating principle.

Finally, inasmuch as they were eyewitnesses, the Twelve could have no "successors." Witnesses cannot be replaced, and the institution of the Twelve could not be replaced. This institution pertained only to the founding of the Church, not its later history. The "apostolic succession" of the Church does not include a succession to the institution of the Twelve. Thus, after one of them was martyred (Acts 12:2), no

substitute was chosen for him. Other men in the New Testament were called "apostles," but no one could take the place of these Twelve. Their ministry was unique, because it was "foundational" to the Church's origin (cf. Revelation 21:14).

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