

May 28, 2006

Sunday of the Blind Man

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The essence of the Gospel is the Lord's Resurrection, which is the key to His identity. Because they are inseparable, let us look at these two subjects together.

First, the Resurrection is the core substance of the "good news." It is not just *one of the things* that Christians believe, but the heart and kernel of the *evangelion*. For this reason the earliest, shortest version of the Creed asserted simply, "Jesus is Lord," an assertion explained in the first apostolic sermon: "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:32,36).

The Apostle Paul, in his sermon at the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, proclaimed the same Gospel of the Resurrection: "And we declare to you glad tidings (*evangelion*)--that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus" (Acts 13:31-32).

Hence, "Christ is risen" is just another way of saying, "Jesus is Lord." His lordship and His resurrection are synonymous, forming the fundamental thesis of the faith, the confession through which we are saved. "If you confess with your mouth," wrote Paul, "that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). These two salvific assertions are substantially identical.

It is by virtue of Jesus' Resurrection, therefore, that we are justified. In fact, the first time the noun "justification" appears in the New Testament, Paul proclaims that Jesus "was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). He had earlier written, "For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17) No Resurrection, no justification.

It is through Jesus' Resurrection, then, that we are begotten as children of God. St. Peter wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has *begotten* us again to a living hope *through the resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

Second, the Resurrection is the key to the identity of Jesus. It is by His Resurrection that Jesus is constituted as God's Son. This is not a denial of His eternal sonship in the bosom of the Father, nor a rejection of the doctrine of the hypostatic Incarnation. This thesis of Sonship-by-Resurrection has nothing to do with "adoptianism." It affirms, rather, that the redemptive sonship of God's eternal Son, the very man Jesus, includes His perfection through death and the resurrection from the dead. Thus, St. Paul wrote of "Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and established [*horisthentos*] as the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Paul's statement does not refer to the eternal generation of God's Son, nor does it mean simply the Incarnation. It is specifically a reference to the Lord's resurrection from the dead.

In what sense does God establish Jesus His Son by the Resurrection? St. Paul says, "in power." By His resurrection Jesus is established as God's Son "in power"--*en dynamei*. Through the resurrection from the dead, that is, something really new happened to Jesus. He is different from before. Now this divine Person incarnate has gone through, tasted, and been transformed by the experience of dying and rising again as a human being. He has thus been "made perfect" (Hebrews 2:10; 5:9). His perfected Sonship is established now "in power."

It is the risen Lord, therefore, the perfected man Jesus, who declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." It is a human being, God's Word in the flesh, who claims all authority, both in heaven and on earth, by reason of His resurrection from the dead. Because God raised Him from the dead, Jesus became something that He was not before. By His resurrection from the dead He is constituted God's Son in power, having universal authority in heaven and on earth. Through His resurrection He becomes the Head of creation and the medium of humanity's union with God. This is the meaning of the glad expression of our faith, "Jesus is Lord." Jesus is Lord, inasmuch as

"Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."

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