

July 30, 2006

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

At the beginning of his ministry Ezekiel was shown a scroll, on which he beheld writing "on the inside and on the outside" (2:10). The prophet was commanded to eat the scroll, which was, of course, God's Word of revelation.

Now God's Word, according to St. John Chrysostom, "is ever eaten yet never consumed," so the scroll of Ezekiel was not destroyed when he ate it. Indeed, John the Seer later described his own memorable encounter with that same document (Revelation 5:1).

I suggest that we look more closely at that revelatory scroll and inquire, more specifically, why it is written on both sides and what this means.

Since the Scroll is God's Word, the inside of it, if I am not deceived, is the Father's eternal Logos written from within. The Father writes inasmuch as He begets the Word, God from God, light from light. Also, not to be taken for Arians, let us surely and promptly insist that at no point did God begin to write this Word; He is, rather, the unbegotten Scribe, *ho grammateus anarchos*, who pens His Composition in the grammar of eternity. As for the Scroll, it is the eternal inscription of the Father, His only begotten Son, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. Indeed, according to the Creed, the Scroll is of one essence (*homoousios*) with the Scribe. The written message, therefore, is absolutely complete and sufficient, though no one but God can read it.

For reasons having to do with goodness and love, however, the Father is not satisfied with keeping this eternal Word on the inside, all to Himself, as it were. He determines, rather, for the Scroll also to be written *ad extra*, on the outside, so that the goodness and love of the Scribe and the Scroll may be shared with a multitude of readers--that the love with which the Father loves the Son may be in them, and He in them.

Therefore, with the willing (but necessary) cooperation of a second writer, a young Galilean woman, the Scroll is inscribed on a second

side, when the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. The Scroll remains, nonetheless, one and the same, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. It is a single Scroll inscribed on two faces, positioned in the two directions that constitute history, *homo Deo, Deus homini*.

These two directions--man to God and God to man--indicate that the Scroll is the medium of a transmission--and not the medium only, but also the Mediator, the single link between God and all that is not God. Those on the outside have no access to the inside except through that Scroll, for the simple reason that the Father has no dealings with any creature, not even in Creation, except through His Son.

The Scroll, moreover, is wonderfully translucent, so the glory that shines through it is "as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is truly luminous, a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Man was created, in fact, for no other purpose than for the enjoyment of this Scroll.

Nor was the Incarnation a kind of divine afterthought. Indeed, the first lineaments on the Scroll's second side were already penciled-in, as it were, in Creation itself, when man was formed *capax Dei*. This expression (for which, I apologize, there is no real English equivalent) means, not only that human nature was so constructed as to be capable of elevation to the divine nature by grace; it also means that man's nature was so formed, in the act of its Creation, as to be capable of assumption by God's Word. Humanity was *designed* with a view to the Hypostatic Union.

Moreover, truly to affirm the Incarnation we should say, with all the reverence we can muster, not only that man is *capax Dei*, but also that God must in some sense be *capax hominis*. There is something about God's eternal Scroll that makes it capable of receiving an inscription on a second side. The translucency of the Incarnation thus teaches us something also about the inner life of the Scroll--just enough, in fact, for trembling.

It is to this Scroll that we turn our gaze at all times. Our only source of the knowledge of both God and man is the place where they two are joined forever, that Parchment penned on both sides. This is the Scroll that Ezekiel, rapt in mystic vision, was told to take and eat. We too,

sitting by the Chebar of our exile, are told to do the same--to take the Word into ourselves, making it our food and inwardly digesting it.

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