

**April 3, 2011**

Fourth Sunday of Lent

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

In the traditional translation of Luke 2:49, Jesus asks his mother, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" It wasn't very long ago that other translations---the RSV, in particular---changed this question to something along the lines of "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?"

The arguments favoring this change leave me unconvinced. There are half a dozen unambiguous ways in which the canonical Greek text could have said, "Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" In fact, however, the Greek text of this verse does not even mention a "house."

Consequently, I prefer something closer to the traditional translation, but let me make the rendering a bit more literal: "Did you not know that I must be about the things of my Father?"

Commentators claim to find this verse obscure, but I believe its meaning is perfectly clear:

First, the word "must" translates the impersonal Greek verb *dei*, an expression often found in connection with Jesus' sense of personal vocation. He knew there were things he *must* do: "I *must* preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent" (Luke 4:43). And, "The Son of Man *must* suffer many things" (9:22). And, I *must* journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem" (13:33). And so on. "I must be" is consistent with many things Jesus said about himself.

Second, "to be about" is a reasonable approximation of the Greek expression, *einai en*, which more literally means, "to be in." Perhaps closer is the recent American informal idiom, "to be into" something, in the sense of being engaged in---or taken up with---something.

Third, "the things of my Father" in this verse comes as close as English style will allow as a translation of *ta tou Patros mou*. "The things," in Greek, is actually a form of the definite article: *ta*. That is to say, it is simply the word "the," used as a neuter plural substantive. As there is no way to duplicate this idiom in English, the word is traditionally paraphrased as "business" or "affairs." These are the sundry "things" the Father has charged His Son to accomplish.

Human existence is composed, in fact, of myriad moments, each burdened with unique opportunities and /or particular responsibilities. These are discrete. The continuity of "time" (*chronos*) does not preclude the phenomenon of "times"

(*kairoi*). The texture of life may be likened, in this respect, to the water in a bay: in addition to the large, scheduled motions of ebb and tide, there are smaller waves and thousands of eddies, each of them---no matter the size---reflecting the light from a particular slant. The physical continuity of the water in no way diminishes the particularity of its waves and undulations.

Human life is lived in moments. For "every purpose under heaven" there is what Ecclesiastes calls its "time," its *'eth*. Human existence is made up of these sundry *'ittim*, the diverse "occasions" of man's many and diverse activities (Ecclesiastes 3 *passim*). These individual occasions no more obstruct the flow of life than the variety of notes and chords in a melody impedes the flow of the music. This is how a human life is structured.

Now, the Christian faith contends that the salvation of the human race was accomplished through the passage of a specific human life. The continuity of Jesus' resolve, his singleness of purpose---the "one thing necessary" that governed his soul---was worked out through myriad distinct moments. Apostolic preaching summarized them, saying that Jesus of Nazareth "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

The single "will of the Father who sent me" (John 5:30) was pursued in the great diversity called "these things"---*tavta* (1:28; 2:18; 5:16; 6:1; 7:1-etc.). The Apostle John, who identifies himself as "the disciple who testifies of *these things* and wrote *these things*" (21:24), assures us that "these things [*tavta*] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31). Both aspects of Jesus' life---its unity of intent and its multiplicity of concerns---are contained in the expression, "the things of my Father."

©2011 Patrick Henry Reardon

**All Saints Orthodox Church**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

**Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor**

[phrii@touchstonemag.com](mailto:phrii@touchstonemag.com)

**Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:**

[www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html)

**Pastoral Ponderings:**

[http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral\\_ponderings.php](http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php)