

June 26, 2011

Saint David of Thessaloniki

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The revelation of God's purpose and power in the Resurrection of His Son was accomplished, not only through the event itself, but also in the altered awareness of those to whom it was revealed. Moreover, our own knowledge and understanding of the Resurrection is determined by the historically effected consciousness of its original witnesses. For this reason, it seems important to reflect on the manner in which the Resurrection was revealed to them.

We must first remark that none of those witnesses actually saw the Resurrection. They did not watch it happening; the significance of their witness did not consist in their objective observation of it. Although we Christians hold the Resurrection of Christ to be an objective historical fact, Holy Scripture does not present its plain and unadorned objectivity as the form of its revelation. Not one of those original "saints," to whom the faith was once delivered, was permitted to view the Resurrection as one might view a waterfall or the flight of a bird.

I want to inquire what this circumstance---well known to readers of Holy Scripture---means with respect to revelation and faith. After all, it was undeniably possible for God, if He wished it, to arrange the Resurrection in such a way that the Apostles and the holy women would be eye-witnesses to the act itself. Because God did not choose to do so, I propose to consider the possibility of it, hoping to throw light on what we *do* mean when we speak of "revelation" and "faith" with respect to the Resurrection:

So, let us fancy, for a moment, that the Resurrection was presented to the saints simply as an objective fact, a thing they empirically observed like any other historical occurrence. Let us suppose the Apostles *knew* the Resurrection pretty much the same way, for instance, the eye-witness, Dr. David Hosack, *knew* that Aaron Burr shot Alexander Hamilton: Hosack saw the event as a self-contained fact, an "it" to which he remained external.

If the original believers had observed the Resurrection in this way, I submit---if the saints had known the Resurrection the same way Hosack *knew* what happened in the Burr-Hamilton duel---we would mean something quite different when we speak of the Resurrection as "revealed." The witnessing saints would have remained merely external observers of it.

The Resurrection of Jesus, however, was not revealed this way. The truth of it was conveyed, not by the factual observance of an "it," but through the personal encounter with a "thou." The fact of the Resurrection was conveyed to the saints in a completely interpersonal context. Believers learned the objective

fact of it through their encounters with the risen Christ. The fact of the Resurrection was subsumed into a personal presence.

The consciousness of the chosen witnesses, then, was altered, not by the observance of a bare fact external to themselves, but by seeing, hearing, and touching the beloved Savior, who called them by name and forcefully intruded his person into their conscious experience. The revelation of the Resurrection was inseparable from this transpersonal intrusion, in which the risen Lord, whose overpowering presence was brought to bear on their attention, effected a new and non-negotiable awareness.

I submit, moreover, that this mode of the original revelation pertains also to its transmission; our own knowledge of the Resurrection is rooted in---and determined by---the historically effected consciousness of the "saints." The risen Jesus is conveyed to us, not as a known external object, but as a personal presence: "what we have seen and heard we declare to you" (1 John 1:3). This is what we mean when we speak of "the faith once delivered to the saints."

Moreover, in the apostolic writings we also perceive how the historically effected consciousness of the saints prompted their immediate reflection on the theological significance of the Resurrection. That is to say, a "theology" of the Resurrection began to develop within the revelation itself. We observe, for instance, how the encounter of the risen Jesus with the two Emmaus-bound disciples assumed a theologically reflective form, relating the experience to the understanding of the Scriptures. Their hearts burned within them as they listened to the explanation of biblical prophecy (Luke 24:13-28).

We find this pattern throughout the New Testament. Even the first apostolic sermon developed a theology of the Resurrection through the exegesis of certain specific psalms (Acts 2:24-36). Jesus did not simply "rise." He "rose again the third day *according to the Scriptures*" (1 Corinthians 15:4).

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