

Jun 1, 2014

Sunday After the Ascension

### Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Whereas early Apostolic testimony, the letters of St. Paul, and the Synoptic sources normally speak of Christ's Resurrection as the act of the Father, the event itself---the noun---is invariably the Resurrection of Christ. Christ, that is to say, is also active in the Resurrection; He is the one that rises.

Thus, it is always the Resurrection---the Anastasis---of Christ. The narrative comments of Luke, even as he cites the apostolic testimony that Jesus "was raised," still speak of "the Resurrection of Christ" (Acts 1:22; 2:31; 4:33; cf. Romans 1:4; 6:5).

In the perspective of John's Gospel, especially, Jesus is said---actively---to rise, as though on his own. Thus, the Good Shepherd proclaims, "I lay down my life (psyche) that I may take it again."

There is a simple logic involved here: If the activity of the Savior is truly redemptive, then his role in it must be active. In some sense, the slain Messiah must raise himself. So he goes on to declare, "No one snatches [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have the power (exsousia) to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again" (John 10:17-18). This form of Resurrection-rhetoric is strikingly different from that of the early Apostolic kerygma.

To appreciate the difference, we may compare these Good Shepherd texts to St. Peter's sermon on the morning of Pentecost. At that time, we recall, Peter said to the Jews, "This

Jesus, whom you killed, God has raised up." We observe that Jesus appears here only in the accusative case; he is the object of the verb: 'You killed him; God raised him.' According to John's formulation, on the other hand, Jesus lays his life, and Jesus takes it again. In both dying and rising, the activity is that of Jesus.

John preserves the identical perspective in an earlier dominical logion: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up-eyero avton." Here, too, the Resurrection is the work of Jesus, even though John immediately slips into the traditional passive voice to explain what he means: "He was speaking of the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised (egerthe) from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word Jesus spoke" (2:19-22).

The active rhetorical tone normally prevailed when Christians used the verb anistemi to speak of the Resurrection---to rise rather than to be raised. Although Paul, when he preached the Resurrection, used the inherited form ("was raised"), he was disposed to change his style when he wrote about it. Thus, in his earliest written reference to the Resurrection, he switches to an active verb with Jesus as the subject: "We believe Jesus died and rose---aneste" (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Mark, likewise, In the earliest of the Four Gospels, preserves the active expression in the words Jesus spoke immediately after the Transfiguration: "He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise (anastei) from the dead. So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what was the rising (anastenai) from the dead (Mark 9:9-10).

Mark also maintains the identical form in Jesus' first prophecy of the Cross of the Cross: "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things . . . , and after three days rise again---anastenai" (8:31). A later editorial hand, maintaining Mark's style, begins the epilogue to his Gospel, "Having risen (anastas) on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . ." (16:9).

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