

Good Friday First Hour Prayers
Judas' Remorse
The Trial Before Pontius Pilate

April 13, 2012
Revision B

5th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: Matthew 27:3-10 "Judas' Remorse"

“When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he felt regret and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned in betraying innocent blood’. They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself’. And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money’. So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him who was valued by the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me’” (Matthew 27:3-10).

We might note the contrast here between Mary of Bethany and Judas. Both had followed Jesus for three years, and Judas had even been given the authority to heal the sick and raise the dead (Matthew 10:1-8). Both had watched the Master do the same. But the realization of just Who Jesus was had penetrated Mary's heart, but had not affected Judas. Mary so appreciated the Master's forgiveness that she spent a great deal of money on ointment to prepare for His burial (John 12:7). Judas couldn't care less, and sold the Master for a few coins (Matthew 26:15). One of the hymns¹ for Holy Wednesday states,

“While Mary brought expensive oil, the disciple came to an agreement with the transgressors. She rejoiced to pour out what was very precious; he made haste to sell the One Who is above all price. She acknowledged Christ as Lord; he severed himself from the Master. She was set free, but Judas became the slave of the enemy. Grievous was his lack of love! Great was her repentance!”

John Chrysostom noted² the sequence and timing of Judas' remorse. Judas was in the grip of an evil spirit (John 13:27) because he had allowed this due to his covetousness. In spite of this, the truth and the shamelessness of Judas and the Jewish leaders were exposed for everyone to see.

“Note when it is that he feels remorse: when his sin was completed, and had received an accomplishment. The devil is like this; he keeps the unwatchful from seeing the evil before this time, lest he, whom he has taken, should repent. When Jesus was saying so many things, Judas was not influenced; but when his offense was completed, then repentance came upon him; but not then profitably. To condemn it, to throw down the pieces of silver, and to disregard the Jewish leaders were all acceptable things; but to hang himself, this was unpardonable,

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¹ Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, The Lenten Triodion, St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, PA, 1994, P. 538.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXV, 2.

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and a work of an evil spirit. The devil led him out of his repentance too soon³, so that he should reap no fruit from it; and he carries him off by a most disgraceful death, having persuaded him to destroy himself”.

“Note also the truth shining forth on every side, even by what the adversaries do. Even the death of the traitor stops the mouths of those that had condemned Christ, and does not allow them to have so much as a shadow of an excuse for their shamelessness. What could they have to say, when the traitor is shown to pass such a sentence on himself?”.

“Listen, you covetous, consider what befell Judas; at the same time he lost the money, committed the sin, and destroyed his own soul. Such is the tyranny of covetousness. He did not enjoy the money, the present life, or that to come, but lost all at once; having gotten a bad character with those men, so hanged himself”.

“After the act, then, some see clearly. These men for a time were unwilling to have a clear perception of the fact, but said, ‘What is that to us? You see to it’ (Matthew 27:4). This thing of itself is a most heavy charge against them. This is the language of men bearing witness to their daring and their transgression, but intoxicated by their passion, and unwilling to rein in their

³ We might apply Chrysostom's words to all who contemplate suicide. To sorrow for one's sins is a good thing. Sometimes we need to consider the impact and ramifications of our deeds. We needn't rush away from this. The Lord knows what we are doing. In taking time to consider what we have done, our repentance may become deeper and more sincere.

satanic attempts, senselessly wrapping themselves up in a veil of feigned ignorance”.

Commenting on Judas’ love of money, Chrysostom pointed out⁴ that Paul referred to covetousness as idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

“Far more grievous than an evil spirit is the lust of money-loving and many obey it more than others do idols. The evil spirits in many things disobey; but in this case the covetous yield everything, and whatever it tells them to do, they obey. ‘Be at war with all’, it says, ‘at enmity with all, disregard nature, despise God, sacrifice to me yourself’, and in all they obey. To the graven images they sacrifice oxen and sheep; but avarice says, ‘sacrifice to me your own soul’, and the man obeys”.

Speaking of the Sanhedrin, Jesus spoke of their treason in the same terms as Judas. Chrysostom noted⁵ that they pronounced and displayed their own condemnation by buying the Potter’s Field.

“Do you see them again self-condemned by their conscience? Because they knew that they had purchased the murder of Christ, they did not put the money into the treasury, but bought a field to bury strangers in. This also became a witness against them, and a proof of their treason. The name of the place proclaimed their blood-guiltiness more clearly than a trumpet. They didn’t do it at random, but having taking counsel, so that no one should be clear of the deed, but all guilty. These things prophecy foretold from of old”.

“Today there are also those that take by violence countless things belonging to others, and excuse themselves if they put some ten or a hundred gold pieces into the alms box. Touching whom also the prophet said, ‘You covered my altar with tears’ (Malachi 2:13). Christ is not willing to be fed by covetousness, He doesn’t accept this food. Why do you insult your Lord, offering Him unclean things? It is better to leave men to pine with hunger, than to feed them from these sources. It is better to give nothing, than to give the things of one set of persons to others. Tell me, if you saw any two persons, one naked, one having a garment, and then having stripped the one that had the garment, you were to clothe the naked, would you not have committed an injustice? It is surely plain to every one! If giving all that you have taken to another, you have committed an injustice, and not shown mercy; when you give only a small portion of what you rob, and call the deed alms, what manner of punishment will you not undergo?”

During this whole time, the future Apostle Paul was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6); Paul knew all about this firsthand, and may have been involved in the decision to use Judas’ 30 pieces of silver to buy the Potter’s Field (Matthew 27:3-10).

Good Friday First Hour Reading: Zechariah 11:10-13 "The Thirty Pieces of Silver"

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXV, 3.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXV, 3.

The Hebrew Masoretic text and the Greek Septuagint text differ a little for this Reading. Therefore the English translation from both is presented below:

“I will take my beautiful staff, and cast it away, that I may break my covenant, which I made with all the people. It shall be broken in that day; and the Canaanites, the sheep that are kept for me, shall know that it is the word of the Lord. I will say to them, ‘If it be good in your eyes, give me my price, or refuse it’. They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Drop them into the furnace, and I will see if it is good metal, as I was proved for their sakes’. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them into the furnace in the house of the Lord” (Zechariah 11:10-13 LXX).

“And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the people. So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord. Then I said to them, ‘If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain’. So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter” (Zechariah 11:10-13 NKJ).

Tertullian spoke⁶ of the difference in the Scriptures between figures and prophecies that were fulfilled in a literal fashion. The price Judas received was one of the prophecies that were fulfilled in a literal fashion.

“In the Scriptures, there are figures, but there are also literal statements; are all not shadows, but there are bodies too. We have prophecies about the Lord Himself, which are clearer than the day. It was not figuratively that the Virgin conceived in her womb, when she bore Emmanuel, that is, Jesus, God with us (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). Even granting that He was figuratively to take the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria (Isaiah 8:4), still it was literally that He was to ‘enter into judgment with the elders and princes of the people’ (Isaiah 3:13). In the person of Pilate ‘the heathen raged’, and in the person of Israel ‘the people imagined vain things’. ‘The kings of the earth’ in Herod, and ‘the rulers’ in Annas and Caiaphas, ‘were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Anointed’ (Psalm 2:1-2). Again He was ‘led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearer’, that is, Herod, ‘is dumb, so He opened not His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:7). ‘He gave His back to scourges, and His cheeks to blows, not turning His face even from the shame of spitting’ (Isaiah 50:6 LXX). ‘He was numbered with the transgressors’ (Isaiah 53:12); ‘He was pierced in His hands and His feet’ (Psalm 22:16). ‘They cast lots for his clothing’ (Psalm 22:18); ‘they gave Him gall, and made Him drink vinegar’ (Psalm 69:21); ‘they shook their heads, and mocked Him’ (Psalm 22:7); ‘He was appraised by the traitor in thirty pieces of silver’ (Zechariah 11:12). What figures of speech do Isaiah and David give us here? These are all prophecies that were fulfilled literally”.

Tertullian noted⁷ that Jesus could have been betrayed by a stranger, and not by a friend and Apostle. He also could have been taken without a price for His betrayal. Yet the Passover was His own Feast, and all this was done intentionally.

⁶ Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 20.

⁷ Tertullian, The Five Books Against Marcion, II, iv, 40.

“In like manner the law prefigures His passion. Of all the festal days of the Jews He chose the Passover (Luke 22:1). Moses had declared that there was a sacred mystery: ‘It is the Lord’s Passover’ (Leviticus 23:5). How earnestly, therefore, does He reveal the bent of His soul: ‘With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’ (Luke 22:15). It was because He had to be ‘led like a lamb to the slaughter; and because, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so was He not to open His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:7), that He so profoundly wished to accomplish the symbol of His own redeeming blood. He might also have been betrayed by any stranger, but instead He fulfilled a Psalm: ‘He who ate bread with me has lifted up his heel against me’ (Psalm 41:9). Without a price He might have been betrayed. What need of a traitor was there in the case of One, Who offered Himself to the people openly, and might as easily have been captured by force or taken by treachery? This might have been well enough for another Christ, but would not have been suitable for One, Who was accomplishing prophecies. It was written, ‘The Righteous One did they sell for silver’ (Amos 2:6). The exact amount and the destination of the money were clearly foretold by Jeremiah⁸: ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him who was valued, and gave them for the potter’s field’ (Matthew 27:10). When He so earnestly expressed His desire to eat the Passover, He considered it His own feast; for it would have been unworthy of God to desire to partake of what was not His own”.

Jerome noted⁹ that the wording is different between the Hebrew text, which Matthew quotes (Matthew 27:9-10) and the Greek Septuagint text for Zechariah 11:12-13. Cyril of Jerusalem also noted¹⁰ this difference in the text between the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint, where the Hebrew said that the 30 pieces of silver were used for the potter’s field and the Septuagint said that it was used in the foundry. Cyril said that the two texts are saying the same thing, since potters used a foundry for sifting off the good clay from the bad. Cyril stated,

“Regarding the thirty pieces of silver, I will say to them, ‘If it is good in your sight, give me my price, or refuse, etc.’ (Zechariah 11:12 LXX). One price is owed to Me for My healing the blind and lame, and I receive another; for thanksgiving, I receive dishonor, and for worship, I receive insult. Do you see how the Scripture foresaw these things? ‘And they weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver’ (Zechariah 11:12 LXX). How exact the prophecy! How great and unerring the wisdom of the Holy Spirit! He said, not ten, or twenty, but thirty, exactly as many as there were. Does he who received it keep it? Or does he give it back? After he has given it back, what becomes of it? The Prophet says then, ‘And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them into the house of the Lord, into the foundry’ (Zechariah 11:13 LXX). Compare the Gospel with the Prophecy: Judas, it says, was remorseful, and cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed” (Matthew 27:5).

“But now I have to seek the exact solution of this seeming discrepancy. Those who make light of the prophets, allege that the Prophet says on the one

⁸ Tertullian quotes Matthew’s Gospel text, but the quote in Matthew resembles Zechariah 11:12 more than it resembles Jeremiah 32:7-15. Both Jeremiah and Zechariah foretold this event. Zechariah mentioned 30 pieces of silver, and Jeremiah mentioned 17 *shekels* of silver without mentioning the number of coins.

⁹ Jerome, Letters, LVII, 7.

¹⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 10-11.

hand, ‘And I cast them into the house of the Lord, into the foundry’; but the Gospel on the other hand, ‘And they gave them for the potter’s field’ (Matthew 27:10). Hear then how they are both true. For those conscientious Jews, when they saw that Judas was remorseful and said, ‘I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood’, reply, ‘What is that to us; you see to that’ (Matthew 27:4). Is it then nothing to you, the crucifiers? Shall he who received and restored the price of murder see to it, and shall you the murderers not see to it? Then they say among themselves, ‘It is not lawful to cast them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood’ (Matthew 27:6). Out of your own mouth is your condemnation; if the price is polluted, the deed is polluted also”.

“How is there no disagreement, if the Gospel says, ‘the potter’s field’, and the Prophet, ‘the foundry?’ Not only goldsmiths, or brass-founders, have a foundry, but potters also have foundries for their clay. They sift off the fine and rich and useful earth from the gravel, and separate from it the mass of the refuse matter, and temper the clay first with water, that they may work it with ease into the forms intended. Why then do you wonder that the Gospel says plainly ‘the potter’s field’, whereas the Prophet spoke his prophecy like an enigma, since prophecy is in many places enigmatical?”

Good Friday First Hour Epistle: Galatians 6:14-18 "Glory in the Cross"

The subject “Glory in the Cross” appears time and time again in the Orthodox Lectionary. This Epistle lesson for First Hour Prayers is also used in the Orthodox Church for the Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross in September, and for the 22nd Sunday After Pentecost (usually in November). In the West, this Epistle lesson is commonly used in July. For another viewpoint on the subject “Glory in the Cross”, see the Study of the Old Testament Reading from Exodus 33 that is used for Good Friday Burial Vespers.

Background for Galatians

Paul and Barnabas visited Southern Galatia on their First Missionary Journey around 47-48 AD (Acts 14:1-23). In Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, Paul and Barnabas ran into violent disagreements with the Jews living there. In Lystra, Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19); in Iconium, they escaped just before they were stoned (Acts 14:5-6). After appointing elders for these Galatian churches, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria (Acts 14:23).

After their return and report to the brethren in Antioch, “Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ Therefore when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the Apostles and elders, about this question” (Acts 15:1-2). Paul referred to this in his Epistle to the Galatians, “I went up to Jerusalem by revelation and communicated to them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation. Lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain” (Galatians 2:2).

The decision of the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD was a ratification of Paul’s Gospel. The Apostles, elders and brethren in Jerusalem drafted a letter to be read to the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia to this effect. In addition, the Jerusalem brethren counseled the

Gentiles to abstain (1) from things offered to idols, (2) from blood and things strangled and (3) from sexual immorality (Acts 15:28-29). Silas and Joseph (Barsabas) the Lord's step-brother, both leading men in the Jerusalem Church, (Acts 15:22), accompanied Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, Syria for the reading of this letter to the Church there. Joseph then returned to Jerusalem (Acts 15:33) while Silas accompanied Paul on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:34, 40). Going back to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (via Cilicia), "they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4). This visit was about 49 AD.

Paul's next visit to the Galatian Churches was at the beginning of his Third Missionary Journey in about 53 AD (Acts 18:23). Between these two visits, the churches were beset by a number of men who had persuaded the Gentiles to go back to keeping the Mosaic Law. That this occurred soon after 49 AD, Paul alludes to in his Epistle, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the Grace of Christ, to a different Gospel" (Galatians 1:6). Much of this controversy can be traced to a heretical group called the Ebionites¹¹ who were loosely allies with Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-25).

John Chrysostom commented¹² on this at length, saying that it was true, but the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem were directed toward, "the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia" (Acts 15:23), not to the Jews in Jerusalem. He stated also that this was "in condescension to the Jewish believers", which condescension Paul had no need of when preaching to the Gentiles. In fact, Paul kept the Mosaic Law in Jerusalem.

"That this Epistle breathes an indignant spirit is obvious to everyone, even on the first perusal. 'O foolish Galatians' (Galatians 3:1). 'Let no man bother me' (Galatians 6:17). 'Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing' (Galatians 5:2). 'You have become estranged from Christ you who are justified by Law; you have fallen from Grace'" (Galatians 5:4).

"Some of the Jews (i.e. Ebionites) who believed, being held down by the pre-occupation of Judaism, and at the same time intoxicated by vain-glory and desirous of obtaining for themselves the dignity of teachers, came to the Galatians. They taught them that the observance of circumcision, Sabbaths and new moons was necessary, and that Paul, in abolishing these things was not to be tolerated. For, they said, Peter and James and John, the chiefs of the Apostles and the companions of Christ, did not forbid them (i.e. in Jerusalem)."

"But these deceivers, by withholding the causes both of Paul's condescension and that of his brethren misled the simpler (Galatians), saying that Paul was not to be tolerated; he appeared but yesterday while Peter and his colleagues were from the first. Paul was single, but they were many, and pillars of the church. They accused him too of hypocrisy, saying that the very man who forbids circumcision observes the rite elsewhere; and he preaches one way to you and another way to others".

¹¹ The Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian heretical group that rejected the writings of Paul and accepted only the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew. They were strict followers of the Mosaic Law, and advocated a return to Judaism. Some practiced a strict form of asceticism, and abhorred certain foods. For more details, including their connection to Simon Magus, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2002, pp. 37-55, 58-60.

¹² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chap. 1, vv. 1-3.

In addressing this situation, Paul first defended his apostleship, “I neither received it from men, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). Then he went on to address some of the problems in the churches of Galatia.

The Cross Can Be Offensive

In the Epistle from Galatians, Paul addressed the reason why the Ebionites insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised (Galatians 6:12), even though James and the Apostles in Jerusalem had already written to all the Gentile churches that this wasn’t necessary (Acts 15:13-29). Why would they want to do this? There was still a strong influence worldwide of the Pharisees in Jerusalem who insisted on it (Acts 21:20-25). Paul said that they (the Jewish Christians in Galatia) do this “only that they may not suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). Much of the persecution Paul experienced came at the hands of the Jewish leaders¹³ or was instigated by them; and the Ebionites joined them. Thus the Jewish Christians Paul wrote about chose to offend God rather than men, and just to avoid taking up their cross.

Peter wrote to beware of “your adversary the devil who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Do we ever wonder why? He’s been judged and outsmarted by the Cross and he knows his time is limited (Revelation 12:12). Is it any wonder, then, that Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan (like the Ebionites) and who were “enemies of the Cross of Christ?” (Philippians 3:18). As a result, Paul’s preaching of the Cross offended some people, and Paul was persecuted (Galatians 5:11).

We can be well-meaning Christians and still be enemies of the Cross of Christ. When Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer and be killed, Peter rebuked Him, “‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you!’ Jesus turned to Peter and said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matthew 16:21-23). The key is in knowing the Lord’s Will.

John Chrysostom commented¹⁴ that the way this happened is that the Jewish Christians abroad “were reviled by the Jews in Jerusalem for deserting the customs of their fathers” (i.e. the Mosaic Law). “They desire, says Paul, to injure you that they may not have this charged against them, but vindicate themselves by means of your flesh”. Chrysostom added that there was an element of vain-glory involved also, for Paul stated that they did this in order “that they may boast in your flesh” (Galatians 6:13).

Boasting in the Cross

Paul also spoke of boasting in the Cross (Galatians 6:14). This can be done simply by displaying the Cross in our homes and altars, by venerating the Cross in Church and by making the sign of the Cross. John Chrysostom expressed¹⁵ another aspect:

“What is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me, the slave, the enemy, the

¹³ It is noteworthy that until Emperor Nero, Simon Magus’ patron, began persecuting Christians, the Jews organized all persecution of the Early Church.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chap. 6, vv. 12-13.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chap. 6, v. 14.

ungrateful one; He even so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. What can be comparable to this! Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable tenderness; He was not ashamed of being crucified for our sake, and will we be ashamed to confess His infinite solicitude?"

Chrysostom spoke¹⁶ of the world as the affairs of life, the praise of men, glory, wealth and all such things as have a show of splendor. There is a double putting to death, as Paul said, "Through the Cross, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

"They are dead to me and I to them; neither can they captivate and overcome me, for they are dead once for all; nor can I desire¹⁷ them, for I too am dead to them. Nothing can be more blessed than this putting to death, for it is the foundation of the blessed life".

While some members of Israel after the flesh were causing these problems in the Churches of Galatia, Paul contrasted them with the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). In the following, the Lord Himself had used similar terms referring to sons of Abraham. Speaking to the Pharisees, who prided themselves as being descendants of Abraham, Jesus said they really weren't because they didn't do the works of Abraham. Instead they sought to kill Him (John 8:13, 37, 39-40). In Paul's case, those who do the works of Israel (i.e. Jacob) are the Israel of God. (Compare Romans 2:28; 4:2, 3, 16; Matthew 3:9).

Paul wrote about a rule of faith (Galatians 6:16) as being related to the Cross (Galatians 6:14). Paul referred to this as the "Word of the Cross" (1 Corinthians 1:18). This subject has so much depth that it is covered three times in the Orthodox Lectionary: the Third Sunday in Lent (or the Adoration of the Cross), the First Sunday after Pentecost (or All Saints Sunday) and the Exaltation of the Cross in September plus the Sunday Before and the Sunday After.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chap. 6, v. 14.

¹⁷ That is, I just don't want them!

The Trial Before Pontius Pilate

Good Friday First Hour Gospel: Matthew 27:1-56 "The Crucifixion"

4th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: John 18:28-40, 19:1-16 "Jesus Before Pilate"

5th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: Matthew 27:11-32 "Jesus Before Pilate"

The First Appearance Before Pilate: The Accusations: Matthew 27:11-14, John 18:28-32

After a "trial" that lasted half the night, early in the morning, the whole multitude of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:1) led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium where Pontius Pilate held judgment. In utter hypocrisy, they did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover (John 18:28). Anyone who was unclean was not allowed to partake of the Passover meal, and they assumed that any building occupied by Gentiles was unclean. However, anyone plotting murder against his brother was also unclean. The Law required that the unjust punishment that they sought against their brother was to be applied to them (Deuteronomy 19:15-21).

According to tradition¹⁸, twelve flagstaves that were held by Greek servants bent down as if bowing to Jesus as He was being led into the Praetorium. In addition, the runner (a Greek slave) who led Jesus into the Praetorium took off his garment and spread it on the ground just like the Hebrews did on Palm Sunday. The Jewish leaders protested to Pilate regarding both these events, but there was nothing they could do about bent flagstaves, and the runner was just imitating the actions of the Hebrew people earlier in the week. As a result of these things, Pilate was afraid, and wanted to leave the tribunal.

"Pilate then went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' They answered and said to him, 'If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you'. Then Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and judge Him according to your law'. Therefore the Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death', that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die" (John 18:29-32).

We might note that the Jewish leaders claimed that "It is not lawful for them to put anyone to death", but that did not prevent them from executing the Archdeacon Stephen when he said things that they didn't like (Acts 7:54-60). Their motivation here seems to be one of identifying Jesus with malefactors, and not just in murdering Him.

According to tradition¹⁹, in one exchange between Pilate and the Jewish leaders, they had accused Jesus of blasphemy. "Pilate replied, 'If these words are blasphemous, take him for the blasphemy, and lead him away to your synagogue, and judge him according to your law'. The Jews said to Pilate, 'Our law bears that a man who wrongs his fellow-men is worthy to receive forty save one lashes; but he that blasphemous God is to be stoned with stones'. Pilate said to

¹⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, "Part I, The Acts of Pilate", Chapter 1, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

¹⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, "Part I, The Acts of Pilate", Chapter 4, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

them, 'Take him, and punish him in whatever way you please'. The Jews said to Pilate, 'We wish that he be crucified'. Pilate said, 'He is not deserving of crucifixion'.

Luke gives a little more details of the accusations against Jesus. "And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King'" (Luke 23:2). We note that the charges against Him have changed from the "trial" before the Sanhedrin to the "trial" before Pilate. Previously He was accused of blasphemy, but that is not a crime in the eyes of the Romans. So now He is being painted as a rebel and an insurrectionist.

Yet while He was being accused, He said nothing. This was very unusual! Attorneys to represent an accused prisoner were not the custom, and each person represented himself. If it came to a shouting match between Jesus and the Scribes, Jesus had a voice that could be heard by 5000 men outdoors (Luke 9:11-14) above the squirming of children (Matthew 14:21). Jesus could have put up a vigorous defense. Jesus did answer one question that Pilate asked of Him. "Then Pilate asked Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' He answered and said to him, 'You said so'.

The chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing (Mark 15:2). In all this, Jesus' demeanor was very regal, and Pilate began to understand that He really was a king.

By saying nothing, Jesus set Himself above the continuous stream of lies coming from the religious leaders, and Pilate was able to perceive this. Pilate knew that the Sanhedrin had handed Him over to him because of envy (Matthew 27:18). In addition, during Jesus' "trial" before Pilate, Pilate's wife, Claudia Procula²⁰, sent word to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19).

According to tradition²¹, when word was brought to Pilate regarding his wife's dreams, he said to the Jewish leaders, "You know that my wife is a worshipper of God, and prefers to adhere to the Jewish religion along with you". They said to him, "Yes; we know". Pilate then mentioned what his wife said. The Jews answered Pilate, "Did we not tell you that He was a sorcerer? Behold, he has sent a dream to your wife".

According to tradition²², Claudia Procula was a granddaughter of Augustus Caesar, and she was also a good friend of Fulvia, the wife of Jairus, the Synagogue Ruler. Pontius Pilate used to love to engage in intellectual and philosophical arguments with Jairus. Claudia Procula was present at Jairus' house when Jesus raised Jairus' 12-year old daughter from the dead (Mark

²⁰ After Pentecost, Pilate was recalled to Rome to face charges regarding his unjust trial of Jesus, plus a massacre of some Samaritans. Pilate was unable to refute the charges. See note 1, p. 110, Eusebius, Church History, II, vii, in Philip Schaff, Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 1. His wife, St. Claudia Procula, joined the Myrrh-Bearing women, after Pilate's death, in their service to the Early Church, and she is commemorated on October 27. See Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 27.

²¹ Roberts and Donaldson, "Part I, The Acts of Pilate", Chapter 2, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

²² Catherine van Dyke, tr., "The Letters of Pontius Pilate and Claudia Procula", Relics of Repentance, 1st Edition, Issana Press, Lincoln, NE 68503, 1990.

5:41-43), and her own 12-year old son was healed of lameness at the same time. She had tried to influence her husband in favor of Christ, but to no avail. Pilate had been concentrating on his political career, desiring a higher position in Egypt. Hindering Pilate was none other than Herod, where the two supposedly became friends over Jesus' trial (Luke 23:6-13). Herod wanted to install a cousin in place of Pontius Pilate, and this had created a rivalry between them.

After Herod saw Jesus and became friendly with Pilate, Herod pressed Pilate to get Jesus' trial over with quickly so that the two of them could embark on a fishing trip. Herod later double-crossed Pilate and spoke secretly against him to Caesar. Pilate's young son, on hearing that his father had allowed the execution of Jesus, the One who had healed him, could not bear it and suddenly dropped dead.

The Psalms describe Jesus' response to the lies swirling around Him at His trial. The Psalmist says, 'And I was as a man that hears not, and who has no rebuttals in his mouth' (Ps 38:14 LXX); and again, 'But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and was as a dumb man not opening his mouth' (Ps 38:13 LXX).

According to tradition²³, there were twelve men who stood up to try to defend Jesus, where Lazarus and Nicodemus were among them.

"Speaking to them separate from the Jewish leaders, Pilate said to them, 'For what reason do they wish to put Him to death?' They said to him, 'They are angry because he cures on the Sabbath'. Pilate said, 'For a good work do they wish to put him to death?' They said to him, 'Yes'".

"And Pilate, filled with rage, went outside of the Praetorium, and said to them, 'I take the sun to witness that I find no fault in this man' (Luke 23:4). The Jews answered and said to the procurator, 'Unless this man was an evil doer, we would not have delivered him to you'. And Pilate said, 'You take him, and judge him according to your law'. The Jews said to Pilate, 'It is not lawful for us to put any one to death'. Pilate said, 'Has God said that you are not to put to death, but that I am?'"

Yet Pilate was still astounded that Jesus made no reply. "Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!' But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled" (Mark 15:4-5). "So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no fault in this Man'. This was Pilate's first attempt to release Jesus. But they became fiercer, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place'" (Luke 23:1-5).

Three days earlier Jesus had put the people under strict obligation to pay the tribute to Caesar when He said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). A year earlier, after the feeding of the 5000, when "Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone" (John 6:15). Thus the accusations are totally erroneous, and Jesus' accusers knew it.

²³ Roberts and Donaldson, "Part I, The Acts of Pilate", Chapter 2-3, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

John Chrysostom stated²⁴ that the tribunal was so corrupt that there was no point answering most of the charges. When He did answer, it was only briefly so as not to get the reputation of arrogance.

“For these reasons then He replies to nothing, but holds His peace, yet answering briefly so as not to get the reputation of arrogance from continual silence. When the high priest adjured Him, when the governor asked, He replied. But in reply to their accusations He no longer said anything; for He was not then likely to persuade them. Isaiah declares this same thing from of old, ‘In His humiliation His judgment was taken away’” (Isaiah 53:8 LXX). At these things the governor marveled, and indeed it was worthy of admiration to see Christ showing such great forbearance, and holding His peace, Him that had countless things to say.

Theophylact stated²⁵ that when Pilate said to Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?”, that Pilate was mocking and ridiculing the Jewish leaders in their accusations. It is as if he were saying, “You -- penniless, low-born, poorly-clothed, all-alone -- are accused of making an attempt against the throne?” He was ridiculing this charge against Jesus because the commission of such an act required considerable money and assistance. These accusers had no support for their slander except their own shrill voices.

Cyril of Alexandria noted²⁶ that the whole multitude of them began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this *fellow* perverting the nation” (Luke 23:2). What He taught was repentance, and to them, this was perverting the nation!

“Their sole purpose was to bring down to death Him, Who was raising them up to life. This was the object of their stratagems. Yet the Law loudly proclaims, ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor’ (Exodus 20:16). And again, ‘Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous’” (Exodus 23:7)

“They prided themselves in the knowledge of the Divine Laws, but they did not pay attention to the respect due to the Law. Led on by an unrestrained impetuosity into whatever pleased them alone, without examination of its nature, they invented numerous charges, heaping up against Christ accusations which were neither true nor capable of being proved. Pilate recognized this and openly acquitted Jesus not just once²⁷, but three times”.

“When he whose duty it was to judge Him acquitted Him, to make their doom more severe, they earnestly beg that He, Who was guilty of no sin, might suffer as from them the penalty of death. They denied the Holy and Just and asked for a murderer to be granted to them, that they might be partners in his guilt²⁸. For this, they were given up to destruction and slaughter, and perished

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVI, 1.

²⁵ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 301.

²⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 151, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 602-603.

²⁷ By shouting down Pilate’s acquittal three times, Theophylact notes that they give triple confirmation of their own bloodthirstiness. See Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 305.

²⁸ Ironically, the Jewish leaders joined Barabbas’ political faction (the Zealot Party) during the revolt against Rome that ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD. This caused the murders of tens of thousands of

together with their whole race (i.e. c. 70 AD). For this their unholy cry, ‘Crucify Him!’, the Lord said, ‘I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest; it cries out against Me; therefore I have hated it’” Jeremiah 12:7-8).

Pilate and Herod Agree Over Jesus: Luke 23:6-12

When Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he asked if He was a Galilean. Since Herod²⁹ was tetrarch of Galilee (Luke 3:1), Pilate saw a way out of his dilemma of convicting an innocent man to please the Jewish mob: shift the responsibility to Herod³⁰. “And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but Jesus answered him nothing. The chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other” (Luke 23:7-12).

Herod had wanted to see Jesus for over a year, ever since he ordered the beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29). “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants³¹, ‘This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him’” (Matthew 14:1-2). Luke reports more of Herod’s perplexity over who Jesus was. “Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. Herod said, ‘John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?’ So he sought to see Him” (Luke 9:7-9).

About six months later, Luke reports that some Pharisees had warned Jesus that Herod wanted to kill Him. This may have been sincere, or it may have been a cunning way to get Jesus to go to Jerusalem so that they could arrest Him. “On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, ‘Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You’. Jesus said to them, ‘Go, tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected’. Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem’” (Luke 13:31-33).

Thus when Pilate sent Jesus bound to Herod, Pilate satisfied a long-held desire of Herod. By this gesture, Pilate and Herod became friends (Luke 23:12). This was foretold by the Prophet

innocent people, and led to their own destruction. See Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 305.

²⁹ This is Herod Antipas, whose nephew, Herod Agrippa, later executed James the son of Zebedee and imprisoned Peter to please the same Jews (Acts 12:1-3) that organized the Crucifixion of Christ

³⁰ Roman law required that every man be judged by the ruler of the province in which he lived. See Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 303.

³¹ One of the servants of Herod was Chuza, whose wife, Joanna, was one of the eight Myrrh-Bearing women at the Cross and at the Tomb (Matthew 27:55, Luke 24:10).

Hosea, “And having bound Him, they led Him away as a present to the king of Jarim” (Hosea 10:6 LXX). Cyril of Jerusalem stated³²,

“It became Him who was on the eve of making peace between earth and heaven, to make the very men who condemned Him the first to be at peace; for the Lord Himself was there present, who reconciles the hearts of the princes of the earth. Note the exactness of the Prophets, and their true testimony”.

Rufinus of Aquileia adds that there was a reason that the Prophet Hosea referred to Herod as the King of “Jarim”, or “wild vine”, since Herod was not a Hebrew.

“Listen to what the Gospel relates, ‘Pilate hearing that He was from Galilee, sent Him to Herod, who was king in Israel at that time’. Rightly does the Prophet add the name ‘Jarim’, which means ‘a wild-vine’. Herod was not of the house of Israel, nor of that vine of Israel which the Lord had brought out of Egypt, and ‘planted in a very fruitful hill’, but was a wild vine, i.e. of an alien stock. Rightly, therefore, was he called ‘a wild-vine’, because he in nowise sprung from the shoots of the vine of Israel”.

Theophylact stated³³ that Herod Antipas suffered from a passion for novelty. He had heard much about Jesus and supposed that He was just a clever conjuror. While Herod “questioned Him with many words, Jesus answered him nothing” (Luke 23:9), thus frustrating Herod. Herod’s questioning was insincere, had no serious intent, and mocked Jesus all the while. Jesus did not cast pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6), and His silence was an act of compassion. The word which is spoken and brings no benefit becomes the cause of greater condemnation for those who do not listen. To Pilate, whose disposition was better than Herod’s, Jesus did give an answer, but not a clear one. When Pilate asked, “Are You the King of the Jews?”, Jesus replied, “You say so” (Luke 23:3). This has a double meaning; it can mean “Indeed I am!”, or it can mean, “I do not say so; you do!” By ridiculing Jesus, Pilate and Herod give irrefutable testimony that Jesus was not a leader of rebellion and sedition. Had He been so, they would not have toyed with Him, while a great danger hung over them. Theophylact continued:

“According to the Mosaic Law, the testimony of two men is true (Deuteronomy 17:6). In this case, one is the Governor (Pilate) and the other is the King (Herod), where both say that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him (Luke 23:14-15). Jesus is silent, and His enemies bear witness on His behalf. The Jews shout and make a lot of noise, but there is no one to prove their accusations. Yet Pilate was soft and unable to stand fast for the truth. He was afraid of slander that the Jews would falsely accuse him of setting free a man³⁴ who had risen up against the king”.

“The custom of releasing one man at the time of Passover comes from the release of Jonathan by Saul (1 Samuel 14:36-46). When the Jewish nation had made their treaty of submission to Rome, they had been given permission to live according to their own practices and laws. Just as the people had demanded the release of Jonathan, this became the custom at the time of the Passover”.

³² Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 14.

³³ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 304.

³⁴ Yet it is truly ironic that the man that Pilate did release for the Jewish leaders was a notorious murderer and insurrectionist.

Tertullian linked³⁵ Jesus' appearance before Herod as the raging of the heathen and the setting of the kings of the earth against Christ.

“At that time ‘the heathen raged, and the people imagined vain things; the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers gathered themselves together against the Lord and against His Christ’ (Psalm 2:1-3). The heathen were Pilate and the Romans; the people were the tribes of Israel; the kings were represented in Herod, and the rulers in the chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas. When, indeed, He was sent to Herod gratuitously by Pilate, the words of Hosea were accomplished, for he had prophesied of Christ. ‘And they shall carry Him bound as a present to the king’ (Hosea 10:6 LXX). Herod was ‘exceeding glad’ when he saw Jesus, but he heard not a word from Him. For, ‘as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth’, because ‘the Lord had given to Him a disciplined tongue, that he might know how and when it behooved Him to speak’ (Isaiah 50:4). Even that ‘tongue which stuck to His jaws’ (Psalm 22:15), as the Psalm said it should, through His not speaking”.

The Second Appearance Before Pilate: John 18:33-39, 19:6-12, 14-16

After Jesus' return from Herod, “Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ [Jesus had already told Pilate that He was; but Pilate could only understand politics and earthly matters.] Jesus answered him, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ Pilate answered³⁶, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here’. Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’. Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’

According to tradition³⁷, “Jesus said to Pilate, ‘Truth is from heaven’. Pilate replied, ‘Is truth not upon earth?’ Jesus said to Pilate, ‘You see how those who speak the truth are judged by those that have the power on earth’”. When He had said this, Pilate went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all’” (John 18:33-38). This was Pilate's second attempt to release Jesus.

By contrast to Pilate, Paul wrote to Timothy that Timothy's focus was to be in the House of God, which is the Church, the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church has the Holy Spirit, called the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13), and by Him, we know that we are of the Truth (1 John 3:19, 4:6). The Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Therefore the Truth supports the Church and the Church

³⁵ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, II, ii, 4, 42.

³⁶ We might remember Pilate's background at this point. His wife was a Christian and Jesus had healed his son of lameness. The lights seem to be turning on very slowly with Pilate.

³⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, “Part I, The Acts of Pilate”, Chapter 3-4, *First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

supports the Truth. Having no spirit of truth for an absolute reference, like Pontius Pilate, any “truth” is relative and serves only to achieve one’s personal desires.

John Chrysostom stated³⁸ that when Jesus asked Pilate, ‘Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?’ (John 18:34), Jesus said this to expose the evil intention of the Jewish leaders. Jesus did not say this out of ignorance, but from a desire that even Pilate should accuse the Jews in their plotting. Pilate first tried to clear himself of wrongdoing, saying, ‘Am I a Jew?’ Jesus’ reply was a mild reproof. He said to the effect, ‘You have heard from the Jewish leaders; why don’t you make accurate inquiry? They have said that I am a malefactor; ask them what evil I have done! You are not making inquiry, but are simply framing charges against Me!’

Jesus reassured Pilate that He had no intentions of revolt against Rome, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’. Pilate, who was not a very wicked man, nor after their fashion, was being led upward by Jesus. Jesus desired to show that He is not a mere man, but God and the Son of God. ‘If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here’ (John 18:36).

Chrysostom continued to say³⁹ that Jesus kept working on Pilate in order that he might come to the knowledge of the truth.

“Why was it that Pilate did not make inquiry in their presence, but apart, having gone into the judgment hall? He suspected something great respecting Him, and wished, without being troubled by the Jews, to learn everything accurately. Then when he said, “What have you done?” on this point Jesus made no answer; but concerning that of which Pilate most desired to hear, namely, His Kingdom, He answered, saying, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” That is, “I am indeed a King, yet not such as you suspect, but far more glorious,” declaring by these words and those which follow, that no evil had been done by Him. For one who says, “To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth,” shows that no evil has been done by Him. Then when He said, “Every one that is of the truth hears My voice,” He draws him on by these means, and persuades him to become a listener to the words. “If anyone is true, and desires these things, he will certainly hear Me.” And, in fact, Jesus so grabbed Pilate by these short words, that Pilate said, ‘What is truth?’”

“But for the present Pilate applied himself to what was pressing, for he knew that this question needed time, and desired to rescue Him from the violence of the Jews. Therefore Pilate went out, and said, ‘I find no fault in him’ (John 18:38). Consider how prudently Pilate acted. He did not say, ‘Since he has sinned, and is deserving of death, forgive him on account of the Feast’. But having first acquitted Him of all guilt, he asked them over and above, if they were not minded to dismiss Him as innocent, could they forgive Him on account of the time of the Passover?”

In this second attempt to release Jesus, and Pilate proposed releasing Jesus according to the custom that they had at the time of the Passover. “But you have a custom that I should

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXIII, 4.

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXIV, 1.

release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:39) But the Jewish leaders outsmarted him and demanded the release of a notorious murderer, insurrectionist and robber (Luke 23:19). “Then they all cried again, saying, ‘Not this Man, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas⁴⁰ was a robber” (John 18:40). Thus the chief priests implied that Jesus was worse than the notorious Barabbas.

The Barter Over Barabbas: Matthew 27:15-21, 26, John 18:40-19:1

“Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, ‘You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. Having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; and neither did Herod; for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him’ (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). And they all cried out at once, saying, ‘Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas’ — who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder” (Luke 23:13-19). Mark’s account adds that Barabbas⁴¹ was chained up nearby with his fellow rebels for having committed murder⁴² in the rebellion (Mark 15:7)

According to tradition⁴³, Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1), stood up at about this time before Pilate and spoke on Jesus’ behalf, defending Him.

“Nicodemus, a Jew, said, ‘I beseech your honor, let me say a few words’. Pilate said, ‘Say on’. Nicodemus said, ‘I said to the elders and the priests and Levites, and to all the multitude of the Jews in the synagogue, ‘What do you seek to do with this man? This man has done many miracles and strange things, which no one has done or will do. Let him go, and do not wish any evil against him. If the miracles, which he does, are of God, they will stand; but if of man, they will come to nothing. For assuredly Moses, being sent by God into Egypt, did many miracles, which the Lord commanded him to do before Pharaoh. There were there Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8), servants of Pharaoh, and they also did not a few of the miracles which Moses did; and the Egyptians took them to be gods, this Jannes and this Jambres. But, since the miracles which they did were not of God, both they and those who believed in them were destroyed. Now release this man, for he is not deserving of death’. The Jews said to Nicodemus, ‘You have become his disciple, and therefore you defend him’. Nicodemus said to them, ‘Perhaps, too, the procurator has become his disciple, because he defends him also. Has the emperor not appointed him to this place of dignity?’ The Jews

⁴⁰ Barabbas means “Son of Abbas”, and his name is very ironic. In Aramaic, this sounds very much like Barabba, or “Son of Father”, which Jesus spoke about throughout His three-year public ministry.

⁴¹ According to tradition, Barabbas was the only other person in prison at that time. See Roberts and Donaldson, “Part I, The Acts of Pilate”, Chapter 9, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

⁴² According to Josephus’ account of the Jewish rebellion that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD, the Zealots (a political party) used murder as a technique for accomplishing their goals. Political opponents were quietly and systematically assassinated when they least expected it. This created a reign of terror, since no one knew who the Zealots were or who they would strike next. See Josephus, Wars of the Jews, IV, vi, 1.

⁴³ Roberts and Donaldson, “Part I, The Acts of Pilate”, Chapter 5, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

were vehemently enraged at this, and gnashed their teeth against Nicodemus. Pilate said to I them, ‘Why do you gnash your teeth against him when you hear the truth?’ The Jews said to Nicodemus, ‘May you receive his truth and his portion’. Nicodemus said, ‘Amen, amen; may I receive it, as you have said’”.

Also, according to tradition⁴⁴, other devout Jews also stood up and testified on Jesus’ behalf, including the former paralytic who was lowered through the roof (Luke 5:18-26), the man who was born blind (John 9:1-37), and the woman who was healed of a flow of blood (Mark 5:25-34). They testified of all that Jesus had done, including the recent raising of Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the tomb for four days. At this, “Pilate trembled, and said to all the multitude of the Jews, ‘Why do you wish to pour out innocent blood?’”

Pilate then sought to release Jesus after he scourged⁴⁵ Him as a malefactor, intending to release Him after the whipping. In this way, the Jewish leaders would see Jesus get punished, but yet He would still be released. “So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they slapped Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him’”. Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the Man!’” (John 19:1-5). That is to say, why would you want to crucify someone so pitiful? From Pilate’s point of view, the chief priests viewed Jesus as a common malefactor. Therefore he had scourged Him as such, and, in his mind, there was no further need of any more punishment. In doing so, however, Pilate had taken the first step toward abandoning justice and giving way to mob rule.

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁶ that Pilate had many opportunities to release Jesus, and many reasons to do so. In addition to the absence of evidence of Jesus ever having mustered forces or collected armaments, there was the obvious plotting of the Jewish leaders. But there was also the testimony of Pilate’s wife. For Pilate to miss all this suggests that he was rather spineless.

“The dream of Pilate’s wife was no small thing (Matthew 27:19). Why did Pilate not see it himself? He did not see it either because she was more worthy, or because he, if he had seen it, would not have believed it. Therefore it was ordered that the wife should see it, so that it might be clear to all. She does not merely see it, but also suffers many things, that from his feeling towards his wife, the man may be made more reluctant to commit the murder. The time too contributed not a little, for on the very night of the trial she saw it”.

⁴⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, “Part I, The Acts of Pilate”, Chapters 6-8, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

⁴⁵ “Scourging” was done with a whip made of sharp pieces of metal or bone at the end short leather cords. According to Hebrew custom, it was illegal to give more than 39 lashes, since forty lashes was considered fatal. The Apostle Paul received 39 lashes five times from the Jewish leaders (2 Corinthians 11:24). Each “lash” created a number of “stripes” as the sharp pieces of metal dug into the prisoner’s back, resulting in profuse pain and bleeding. This scourging left Jesus very weak, such that He could not carry His Cross to Golgotha. When Claudia Procula, Pilate’s wife came to see him to warn him to have nothing to do with Jesus’ condemnation, she saw Jesus being scourged. Fastened to a post, Jesus was standing in a pool of his own blood, where the scourger was a man that Jesus had healed. See Catherine van Dyke, tr., “The Letters of Pontius Pilate and Claudia Procula”, *Relics of Repentance*, 1st Edition, Issana Press, Lincoln, NE 68503, 1990.

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXXVI, 1.

“But it was not safe, it may be said, for Pilate to let Him go, because they said He made Himself a king. He ought then to have sought for proofs, and a conviction, and for all the things that are infallible signs of usurpation, as, for instance, whether He levied forces, whether He collected money, whether he forged arms, whether He attempted any other such thing. But He was led away at random; therefore neither does Christ acquit him of the blame, in saying, ‘Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin’ (John 19:11). So that it was from weakness that Pilate yielded and scourged Him, and delivered Him up”.

“Pilate then was unmanly and weak; but the chief priests were wicked and criminal. Since Pilate had found out a device with which to release Him, namely, the law of the feast requiring him to release a condemned person, what do they contrive in opposition to that? ‘But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus’” (Matthew 27:20).

Chrysostom also stated⁴⁷ that Pilate wanted Jesus to defend Himself and be acquitted, but since He didn’t answer the charges, he devised another thing. Since it was a custom for them to release one of the condemned, Pilate tried by this means to deliver Him. If the Jewish leaders were unwilling to release Him as innocent, yet as guilty they might pardon Him for the Feast’s sake.

“Do you see how the order is reversed? The petition on behalf of the condemned was customarily with the people, and the granting it with the rulers. Now the contrary has come to pass, and the ruler petitions the people; and not even so do they become gentle, but grow more savage and bloodthirsty, driven to frenzy by the passion of envy. They had nothing with which to accuse Him, and this though He was silent, but they were refuted even then by reason of the abundance of His righteous deeds. Being silent He overcame them that said ten thousand things out of madness”.

“Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him and crucify Him⁴⁸, for I find no fault in Him’. The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God’. Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, ‘Where are You from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?’ Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin’. From then on Pilate sought to release Him” (John 19:6-12). This was Pilate’s third attempt to release Jesus.

But Pilate had now gotten himself into a serious dilemma. By having Jesus scourged as a malefactor, Pilate had already violated his own judgment, and that of Herod, that Jesus was

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXXVI, 1.

⁴⁸ This implies that the Jewish leaders could have had Jesus crucified themselves even without Pilate’s judgment. But they wanted Him to be executed as a common malefactor to stop the spread of His teaching. Later when Stephen, one of the first Deacons, said some things they didn’t like, they stoned him (Acts 7:54-60) without asking Pilate’s permission.

innocent of all charges. He couldn't back down now without losing face. Finally he began to understand the real problem here: Jesus is the Son of God! No wonder the chief priests and elders were envious! (Matthew 27:18) In the Roman pantheon of gods, there were many sons of gods, some legitimate and some illegitimate. But they were all extraordinary characters and objects of worship by Roman citizens! Now Pilate was being asked to crucify one of the gods! No wonder Pilate was "the more afraid"! Pilate probably had no clue how much greater his dilemma really was in that he was about to crucify the God of gods.

John Chrysostom noted⁴⁹ that in asking for Barabbas, the chief priests were demanding someone who was like mannered to themselves. Pilate tried to counteract the fury of the Jewish leaders; he had Jesus scourged and mocked, but to no avail.

"Pilate scourged Him, perhaps desiring to exhaust and to soothe the fury of the Jews. When he had not been able to deliver Him by his former measures, being anxious to stay the evil at this point, he scourged Him, and permitted to be done what was done, the robe and crown to be put on Him, so as to relax their anger. Therefore he led Him forth to them crowned with thorns, that, seeing the insult which had been done to Him, they might recover a little from their passion, and vomit their venom. The soldiers would not have done this, had it not been the command of their ruler".

Yet in all of this, Jesus took care to give the chief priests every chance to avoid murdering Him. John Chrysostom said⁵⁰ of this

"See how much care Jesus took to relieve them from blame, and how much diligence they employed, so as not to leave to themselves so much as a shadow of an excuse. For which was right? To let go the acknowledged criminal or Him about whose guilt there was a question? If in the case of acknowledged offenders it was fit there should be liberation, much more in those of whom there was a doubt. Surely Jesus did not seem to them worse than acknowledged murderers. On this account, it is not merely said they had a robber; but one who was infamous in wickedness, who had perpetrated countless murders. But nevertheless even him did they prefer to the Savior of the world, and neither did they reverence the season because it was holy, nor the laws of humanity, nor any other thing of the kind, but envy had once for all blinded them. Besides their own wickedness, they corrupted the people also, that for deceiving them too they might suffer the most extreme punishment".

Pilate Washes His Hands of the Matter: Matthew 27:22-25, John 19:8-14

"Pilate said to them, 'What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' *They* all said to him, 'Let Him be crucified!' Then the governor said, 'Why, what evil has He done?' But they cried out all the more, saying, 'Let Him be crucified!' When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*'" (Matthew 27:22-24). We might wonder that should go to the trouble of washing his hands in public. He obviously had some serious guilt pangs!

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXIV, 1.

⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVI, 2.

In addition, Pilate realized that he had been outsmarted by the Jewish leaders and was forced into a choice of either condemning an innocent man, or losing face with the people and other government officials like Herod. He and Herod had already agreed that Jesus was innocent of all charges brought against Him (Luke 23:14-15). Now he had scourged Jesus as a malefactor, and the crowd was clamoring for blood, such that a riot was developing. When he offered to free Jesus as a gesture of goodwill in keeping with the Feast, they asked for Barabbas, a terrorist assassin, instead. By washing his hands of the matter, Pilate abdicated responsibility to the mob.

In addition, the Jewish leaders twisted Jesus' words again to make it appear that Jesus was just another insurrectionist like Barabbas. Jesus had already told Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world, and that, if it were, His servants would fight (John 18:36). The Jewish leaders said, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar". This made Pilate afraid about his career advancement, because the Jewish leaders were sure to report this to Caesar.

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat⁵¹ in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' But they cried out, 'Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!' Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led *Him* away" (John 19:8-16).

John Chrysostom noted⁵² that Israel, at the time of Samuel, asked for a king to rule them, just like the Gentile nations. Similarly, the Jewish leaders at Jesus' trial asked for a Gentile king to rule over them. The Lord granted them their wish!

"Thus the Jews, who at first enjoyed the influence of God under Moses and Joshua, sought to have a king over them just like the Gentiles (1 Samuel 8:1-7), and in the wilderness after the manna, remembered the onions (Numbers 11:5). In the same way, refusing the Kingdom of Christ, they invited to themselves that of Caesar (John 19:15). Therefore God set a king over them, according to their own decision. When then Pilate heard these things, he delivered Christ to be crucified. This was utterly without reason! When he ought to have inquired whether Christ had aimed at sovereign power, he pronounced the sentence through fear alone. That this might not befall him, Christ said beforehand, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36-37). But Pilate having given himself wholly up to present things, didn't display any great amount of wisdom. His wife's dream should have been sufficient to terrify him; but by none of these things was he made better, nor did he look to heaven, but delivered Him up. So they laid the cross upon Him as a malefactor."

While sitting in the official position of the Judgment Seat, Pilate washed his hands before the crowd to demonstrate that he felt that he was innocent in condemning a just man. In doing this, Pilate demonstrated that he not only had no understanding of any truth (John 18:38), but also no understanding of right vs. wrong. After all, he and Herod had already agreed that Jesus

⁵¹ According to Unger, Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, the name "The Pavement" in Greek referred to the type of stone used in its construction, and the Hebrew word "Gabbatha" referred to its shape.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

was innocent (Luke 23:14-15). If he really wanted to stand up for justice, he had at his command adequate soldiers to disperse the mob. And he realized that the Jewish leaders were only doing this out of envy (Matthew 27:18). He could have done what Lysias, the Roman commander, did in rescuing Paul from a riot caused by these same Jewish leaders (Acts 21:26-24:9).

From the other Gospel accounts:

“*They* all said to him, ‘Let Him be crucified!’ Then the governor said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’ But they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Let Him be crucified!’ When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*’. And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood⁵³ *be* on us and on our children’. Then he released Barabbas to them; and he delivered *Him* to be crucified” (Matthew 27:22-26).

“So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus to be crucified” (Mark 15:15).

“So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will” (Luke 23:24-25).

According to tradition⁵⁴, “some of the Jewish leaders had said, ‘You are no friend of Caesar’s if you release this man, because he called himself Son of God and king. You wish, then, this man to be king, and not Caesar?’” They reminded Pilate that Jesus was the one that Herod the Great was looking for when he destroyed all the children in Bethlehem 32 years earlier. Pilate was surprised to hear this; it was then that he washed his hands of the matter.

“And Pilate, in a rage, said to the Jews, ‘Always has your nation been rebellious, and you always speak against your benefactors’. The Jews said, ‘What benefactors?’ He said to them, ‘Your God led you out of the land of Egypt from bitter slavery, and brought you safe through the sea as through dry land, and in the desert fed you with manna. He gave you quails, and quenched your thirst with water from a rock, and gave you a law; and in all these things you provoked your God to anger, and sought a molten calf. And you exasperated your God, and He sought to slay you. And Moses prayed for you, and you were not put to death. And now you charge me with hating the emperor’”.

“And rising up from the tribunal, he sought to go out. And the Jews cried out, and said, ‘We know that Caesar is king, and not Jesus. For assuredly the magi brought gifts to him as to a king. And when Herod heard from the magi that a king had been born, he sought to slay him; and his father Joseph, knowing this, took him and his mother, and they fled into Egypt. And Herod hearing of it, destroyed the children of the Hebrews that had been born in Bethlehem’”.

“And when Pilate heard these words, he was afraid; and ordering the crowd to keep silence, because they were crying out, he said to them, ‘So this is He whom Herod sought?’ The Jews said, ‘Yes, it is He’. And, taking water, Pilate washed his hands in the face of the sun, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just man; you see to it. Again the Jews cried out, ‘His blood be upon us, and upon our children’”.

⁵³ In saying this, they were prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD.

⁵⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, “Part I, The Acts of Pilate”, Chapters 9, First Greek Form, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

“Then Pilate ordered the curtain of the tribunal where he was sitting to be drawn, and said to Jesus, ‘Your nation has charged you with being a king. On this account I sentence you, first to be scourged, according to the enactment of venerable kings, and then to be fastened on the cross in the garden where you were seized. And let Dysmas and Gestas, the two malefactors, be crucified with you’”.

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁵ that the Jewish leaders didn’t just want Jesus dead; they also wanted Him humiliated. Therefore they needed Pilate to crucify Him. If they had just stoned Him, as they did Stephen a year later (Acts 7:54-60), He would not have been humiliated like He was on the Cross. Pilate, on the other hand, was given ample opportunity to render a correct and just judgment. Because he refused to do so, he shared in the guilt of crucifying Christ. Chrysostom said:

“They had brought Him in order that the thing might be done by the decision of the governor; but the contrary fell out. He was acquitted, rather than condemned, by the decision of the Governor. Then, because they were ashamed, they said, ‘We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God’” (John 19:7).

“How then when the judge said, ‘Take him, and judge him according to your law,’ did they reply, ‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death’ (John 18:31), while here they go back to the law? And consider the charge, ‘He made himself the Son of God’ (John 19:7). Tell me, is this a ground of accusation, that He who performed the deeds of the Son of God should call Himself the Son of God? What then does Christ do? While they held this dialogue one with the other, He held His peace, fulfilling that saying of the Prophet, that ‘He opens not his mouth; in His humiliation His judgment was taken away’” (Isaiah 53:7, 8 LXX).

“Then Pilate was alarmed when he heard from them, that He made Himself the Son of God, and dreads lest the assertion may possibly be true, and he should seem to transgress. But these men who had learned this, both by His deeds and words, did not shudder, but are putting Him to death for the very reasons for which they ought to have worshipped Him. On this account Pilate no more asks Him, ‘What have you done?’ (John 18:35) but, shaken by fear, he begins the inquiry again, saying, ‘Are you the Christ?’ But Jesus didn’t answer. For Pilate had heard, ‘To this end was I born, and for this I came’, and, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36-37). When Pilate ought to have opposed His enemies and delivered Him, he did not do so, but seconded the fury of the Jews. Then they being in every way silenced, made their cry in a political charge, saying, ‘He that makes himself a king, speaks against Caesar’ (John 19:12). Pilate ought therefore to have accurately inquired, whether He had aimed at sovereignty, and set His hand to expel Caesar from the kingdom. But he did not make an exact inquiry, and therefore Christ did not answer him, because He knew that he asked all the questions idly. Besides, since His works bore witness to Him, He would not prevail by word, nor compose any defense, showing that He came voluntarily to this condition”.

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXIV, 2.

“When He was silent, Pilate said, ‘Do you not know that I have power to crucify you?’ (John 19:10) Do you see how Pilate condemned himself beforehand; for, ‘if the whole rests with you, why do you not let Him go, when you have found no fault in Him?’ When then Pilate had uttered the sentence against himself, then Jesus said, ‘He that delivered Me unto you has the greater sin’. Jesus showed that Pilate also was guilty of sin. Then, to pull down his pride and arrogance, He said, ‘You would have no power except it were given you’” (John 19:11).

“Jesus showed that this did not come to pass at random, but that it was accomplished mystically. Then lest, when we hear, ‘Except it were given you’, we should deem that Pilate was exempt from all blame, on this account therefore He said, ‘Therefore he that delivered Me unto you has the greater sin’. The ‘given’ in this place means what is ‘allowed’; as though He had said, ‘He has permitted these things to be, yet that does not make you clear of the wickedness’. He awed Pilate by the words, and offered a clear defense. On which account Pilate sought to release Him; but they again cried out, saying, ‘If you let this man go, you are not Caesar’s friend’.

“For when they profited nothing by bringing charges drawn from their own law, they wickedly betook themselves to external laws, saying, ‘Every one that makes himself a king speaks against Caesar’. And where has this Man appeared as a tyrant? Did He ever walk unattended, save by His twelve disciples, following in every point a humble mode of living, both as to food, and clothing, and habitation? But O what shamelessness and ill-timed cowardice! For Pilate, deeming that he should now incur some danger were he to overlook these words, comes forth as though to inquire into the matter⁵⁶; but without making any inquiry, he gave Him up to them, thinking to shame them. For to prove that he did it for this purpose, hear what he said”.

“‘Behold your king!’ But when they said, ‘Crucify him!’, he added again, ‘Shall I crucify your king?’ But they cried out, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (John 19:15). Of their own will they subjected themselves to punishment; therefore also God gave them up, because they were the first to cast themselves out from His providence and superintendence. And since with one voice they rejected His sovereignty, He allowed them to fall by their own political plotting. Still what had been said should have been sufficient to calm their passion, but they feared, lest, being let go, He should again draw the multitudes; and they did all they could to prevent this. For a dreadful thing is love of rule, dreadful and able to destroy the soul; it was on account of this that they had never heard Him. And yet Pilate, in consequence of a few words, desired to let Him go, but they pressed on, saying, ‘Crucify him’. And why did they strive to kill Him in this manner? Because it was a shameful death! Fearing therefore lest there should afterwards be any remembrance of Him, they desired to bring Him to the accursed punishment, not knowing that truth is exalted by hindrances. To prove that they had this suspicion, listen to what they said. ‘We have heard that that deceiver said, After three days I will rise again’ (Matthew 27:63); on this account they made all this stir”.

⁵⁶ The “sitting down” on the Judgment Seat showed that Pilate was going to make an inquiry and a judgment.

Theophylact stated⁵⁷ the situation this way. By denying Christ and asking for a murderer instead, they loved what was similar to themselves and joined themselves to Barabbas' revolt against Rome.

“Three times Pilate released the Lord, and three times they shouted against Christ, giving triple confirmation to their own bloodthirstiness. As Peter said, they denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked that a murderer be granted to them (Acts 3:14). They loved that which was similar to themselves. Therefore they joined Barabbas' faction, and themselves became rebels against Rome, and they became the cause of tens of thousands of murders and of their own destruction”.

John Chrysostom also marveled⁵⁸ at the madness of the Jewish leaders in calling Christ's blood down on them and their children. Yet Christ was still willing to receive any of them that later repented. We can also marvel at the greatness of Christ during this whole proceeding.

When they saw the judge washing his hands, and saying, ‘I am innocent’, why did they cry out, ‘His blood be on us, and on our children’? After giving sentence against themselves, then Pilate yielded that all should be done. This was due to their great madness. For passion and wicked desire are like this. They do not allow men to see anything of what is right. But why do they draw down the curse upon their children also? This doesn't make sense!

Nevertheless, though they acted with so much madness, both against themselves, and against their children, the Lover of Man did not confirm their sentence upon their children. But from the one and from the other received those that repented (Acts 2:36-39), and counted them worthy of good things beyond number. For indeed even Paul was of them, and the thousands that believed in Jerusalem (Acts 21:20). And if some continued in their sin, to themselves let them impute their punishment.

And why did Pilate scourge Him? Either as one condemned, or willing to invest the judgment with due form, or to please them. And yet he ought to have resisted them. For indeed even before this he had said, ‘Take Him, and judge Him according to your law’. And there were many things that might have held back him and those men, the signs and the miracles, and the great patience of Him, who was suffering these things, and above all His untold silence. For since both by His defense of Himself, and by His prayers, He had shown His humanity. He showed His exaltation and the greatness of His nature, both by His silence, and by His contempt of what is said; leading them to marvel at Himself. But to none of these things did they give way.

Cyril of Jerusalem commented⁵⁹ on the awesome spectacle that took place. We stand in amazement at what the Lord our God submitted Himself to.

“Look with awe then at the Lord who was judged. He suffered Himself to be led and carried by soldiers. Pilate sat in judgment, and He who sits on the right hand of the Father, stood and was judged. The people whom He had redeemed from the land of Egypt, and often from other places, shouted against Him, ‘Away

⁵⁷ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 304.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVI, 2.

⁵⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 15.

with Him, away with Him, crucify Him' (John 19:15). Why, O Jews? Because He healed your blind? Or because He made your lame to walk, and bestowed His other benefits? So that the Prophet in amazement speaks of this too, 'Against whom have you opened your mouth, and against whom have you let loose your tongue?' (Isaiah 57:4) And the Lord Himself says in the Prophets, 'My heritage became unto Me as a lion in the forest; it gave its voice against Me; therefore have I hated it' (Jeremiah 12:8). I have not refused them, but they have refused Me; in consequence thereof I say, 'I have forsaken My house'" (Jeremiah 12:7).

"Pilate then was unmanly and weak; but the chief priests wicked and criminal. For since he had found out a device with which to release Him, namely, the law of the feast requiring him to release a condemned person, what do they contrive in opposition to that? 'But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus'" (Matthew 27:20).

John Chrysostom observed⁶⁰ that Pilate retaliated against the Jewish leaders in a way that they couldn't complain to Caesar about. With the title on the Cross, Pilate proclaimed the envy and malice of the Jewish leaders, and also formed a basis for the recognition of the Cross when it was excavated by Helena in the 4th Century.

"At the same time repaying the Jews, and making a defense for Christ, Pilate wrote a title for the Cross. The Jewish leaders had given Him up as worthless, and attempted to confirm this sentence by making Him share the punishment of the robbers; Pilate retaliated in order that no one in the future might bring evil charges against Him, or accuse Him as a worthless and wicked person. To close their mouths and the mouths of all who might desire to accuse Him, and to show that they had risen up against their own King, Pilate thus placed, as on a trophy, those letters, which utter a clear voice, and show His Victory, and proclaim His Kingdom, though not in its completeness. Pilate made this clear not in a single language, but in three languages. Since it was likely that there would be a mixed multitude among the Jews on account of the Feast, in order that none might be ignorant, he publicly recorded the madness of the Jews, in all three languages. For they showed malice against Him even when crucified. If He was a mortal and weak, and was about to die, why did they fear the letters asserting that He is the King of the Jews? They asked, 'Say that "he said"' (John 19:19-21). As Pilate wrote it, it is an assertion, and a general sentence, but if 'he said' is added, the charge is shown to be one arising from his own rashness and arrogance. Still Pilate was not turned aside, but stood with his first decision. And it is no little thing that it happened this way. The wood of the cross was buried, because no one was careful to take it up, inasmuch as fear was pressing, and the believers were hurrying to other urgent matters. When the Cross was sought for in later times⁶¹, it was presumed likely that the three crosses would lie together; in order that the Lord's Cross might be recognizable, it was obvious to everyone, first by its lying in the middle, and then by the title. For those of the thieves had no titles."

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

⁶¹ It was during Chrysostom's lifetime that Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, searched for the Cross and found it.

Mary Magdalene's Reaction to Lack of Justice

Mary Magdalene was a wealthy woman who traveled around with Jesus, the Twelve and the Seventy throughout their three-year public ministry. Jesus had freed her from seven demons that were bothering her at the beginning of the three years. Some people infer that these demons had led her into sexual immorality, but this is not the case. If Mary's wealth that she used to support Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:3) had been obtained from prostitution, Jesus would not have accepted her help (Deuteronomy 23:18). In fact, Mary had been living an ascetic life, devoted to the care of the elderly, the sick and the disabled. The demons, seeing her virtuous life, thought that she might be the virgin that Isaiah spoke of (Isaiah 7:14), and tried to cause her to fall into sin and disrupt her in her efforts⁶². After Jesus freed her from these demons, she devoted herself, along with seven other women, to the service and financial support of Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:3).

These eight women are generally identified as the "Myrrh-Bearing Women" because they were prominent both at the Cross and at the tomb on Sunday morning. The eight are:

- Mary Magdalene
- Mary Theotokos (The Virgin Mary)
- Joanna
- Salome
- Mary the wife of Cleopas (or Alphaeus)
- Susanna
- Mary of Bethany
- Martha of Bethany

Of the eight, the first five are the more prominent and outspoken. The last three, according to tradition, were also included. Five of these women were also very wealthy: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and Mary and Martha of Bethany. Salome and Mary the wife of Cleopas had husbands, who were fishermen, and who earned a good living. They were not as wealthy as the other five, but they were undoubtedly able to contribute to Jesus' support.

A confusing aspect in Gospel references to these women is that two women named Mary had a son named James. Mary, the wife of Alphaeus, was the mother of James, one of the Twelve Apostles; the Virgin Mary was the stepmother of James, the Lord's brother (Matthew 13:55, Galatians 1:19).

In Western church tradition, James, the son of Alphaeus, and James, the Lord's brother, have sometimes been identified as the same person. From Eastern tradition, James, the Lord's brother was Bishop of Jerusalem from 30-62 AD and never left the vicinity of Jerusalem. He is the James who rendered the decision of the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD (Acts 15:13-19). Eastern Tradition links James the son of Alphaeus with evangelism abroad, especially in Egypt where he was martyred.

One helpful tip that can clear up the confusion between these two women named Mary is the passage that refers to the Virgin Mary as the mother of James and Joseph (Matthew 13:55). This Joseph is also called Barsabas, Justus and Judas (Acts 1:23, Acts 15:22). Therefore, in Matthew 27:56, the women looking on from afar at the cross were Mary Magdalene, the Virgin

⁶² For more details, see The Life of the Virgin Mary, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 1989, p. 402.

Mary (that is, Mary the mother of James and Joseph) and Salome (the wife of Zebedee and the Virgin Mary's step daughter).

These eight women had been together a lot during Jesus' three-year public ministry. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and others (Luke 8:3) are described as providing for Jesus out of their possessions (that is, acting as deaconesses). These same women had faithfully followed Him from Galilee and had come up with Him to Jerusalem (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40-41 and Luke 23:55).

After the Ascension, Mary Magdalene lived in the same house as the Virgin Mary; that is, the Apostle John's house. At this time, the Virgin Mary was about 48 years old, Mary Magdalene about 41 and John about 25. If Mary Magdalene had been a woman of means and able to help support Jesus' three year ministry (Luke 8:3), this may mean that she, too, sold everything and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

Shortly after Pentecost, Mary Magdalene was led with a strong desire to expose those who unjustly condemned Christ. Traveling to Rome, she asked to present her case before Tiberius Caesar⁶³. That Tiberius Caesar would actually listen to her suggests that she was a Roman citizen and had the right to appeal to Caesar (Acts 22:25-29, 25:7-12), and that she was a woman of means. Appearing before Tiberius Caesar, she presented him with a red egg and announced "Christ is risen!" Other accounts state⁶⁴ that Annas and Caiaphas were also ordered to appear before Tiberius; however Caiaphas died on the ship en route to Rome. She told Tiberius the whole story of Pilate's unjust trial, the release of a murderer and insurrectionist in His place and of the cowering of Pilate to the plotting of the Jewish leaders (Acts 3:13-15, Matthew 27:15-24). Tiberius also heard that Pilate had massacred some Samaritans unjustly⁶⁵ and summoned him to Rome to answer for his actions. Pilate was unable to defend himself; in testimony before Tiberius, everything Pilate said was vigorously refuted by Mary Magdalene, where everything Pilate said appeared to be senseless, deceitful or self-serving. Pilate was imprisoned until Tiberius could decide his punishment⁶⁶. In one account, Pilate was banished to Gaul by Caius Caligula, Tiberius' successor, where he committed suicide⁶⁷. In another account⁶⁸, Pilate died in Rome, but his body was sent to Gaul for burial. Eusebius described⁶⁹ these times as follows:

"After the death of Tiberius (c. 37 AD), Caius Caligula received the empire. Besides innumerable other acts of tyranny against many people, he greatly afflicted the whole nation of the Jews. These things we may learn briefly from

⁶³ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 22.

⁶⁴ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2008, July, p. 953-957.

⁶⁵ A leader of the Samaritans had promised to disclose the sacred treasures, which Moses had concealed on Mt. Gerizim, and the Samaritans came together in great numbers from all quarters. There is no mention of any treasure that Moses placed on Mt. Gerizim, but there was mention of large stones on the neighboring Mt. Ebal, on which were written the Law (Deuteronomy 27:1-14). Pilate, supposing the gathering to be with rebellious purpose, sent troops against them and defeated them with great slaughter. The Samaritans complained to Vitellius, Governor of Syria, who sent Pilate to Rome in 36 AD to answer the charges brought against him. See note 1, p. 110, Eusebius, Church History, II, vii, in Philip Schaff, Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 1.

⁶⁶ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2008, p. 963.

⁶⁷ Eusebius, Church History, II, vii.

⁶⁸ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 2008, p. 965-969.

⁶⁹ Eusebius, Church History, II, 6-7.

the words of Philo⁷⁰, who writes as follows, ‘Great was the caprice of Caius in his conduct toward all, and especially toward the nation of the Jews. The latter he so bitterly hated that he appropriated to himself their places of worship in the other cities, and beginning with Alexandria he filled them with images and statues of himself (for in permitting others to erect them he really erected them himself). The Temple in the holy city, which had hitherto been left untouched, and had been regarded as an inviolable asylum, he tried to alter and transform⁷¹ into a temple of his own, that it might be called the temple of the visible Jupiter, the younger⁷² Caius’. Innumerable other terrible and almost indescribable calamities which came upon the Jews in Alexandria during the reign of the same emperor, are recorded by the same author in a second work⁷³, to which he gave the title, *On the Virtues*. With him agrees also Josephus, who likewise indicates that the misfortunes of the whole nation began with the time of Pilate, and with their daring crimes against the Savior. Hear what he says⁷⁴ in the second book of his *Jewish War*, where he writes as follows, ‘Pilate being sent to Judea as procurator by Tiberius⁷⁵, secretly carried veiled images of the emperor, called ensigns, to Jerusalem by night. The following day this caused the greatest disturbance among the Jews. For those who were near were confounded at the sight, beholding their laws, as it were, trampled under foot. For they allow no image to be set up in their city’. Thus, it was not long after the Crucifixion that there came upon them the penalty for the exclamation, which they had uttered under the same Pilate, when they cried out that they had no other king than Caesar (John 19:15). The same writer further records⁷⁶ that after this another calamity overtook them. He writes as follows, ‘After this he stirred up another tumult by making use of the holy treasure, which is called Corban (Mark 7:9-13), in the construction of an aqueduct three hundred stadia⁷⁷ in length. The multitude was greatly displeased at it, and when Pilate was in Jerusalem they surrounded his tribunal and gave utterance to loud complaints. But he, anticipating the tumult, had distributed through the crowd armed soldiers disguised in citizen’s clothing, forbidding them to use the sword, but commanding them to strike with clubs those who should make an outcry⁷⁸. To them he now gave the prearranged signal from the tribunal.

⁷⁰ Philo, *Legatio Ad Caium*, 43. This is Book IV of the works of Philo, and is still extant. It describes the sufferings, which came upon the Jews as a result of Caius’ command that divine honors should be paid to him.

⁷¹ See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, viii, 2-8. Herod Agrippa subsequently persuaded Caius not to erect his statue in the Temple in Jerusalem.

⁷² “Caius the Younger” to distinguish him from Julius Caesar, who also bore the name Caius, and who was also deified in the Roman pantheon of gods.

⁷³ Philo, *On the Virtues*. This is Book II of the works of Philo, and is no longer extant. It contains an account of the oppression of the Jews during the time of Tiberius, Sejanus, and by Pontius Pilate in Judea.

⁷⁴ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II, ix, 2-3. To request that the images be removed, tens of thousands of Jews fell down before Pilate saying that they would rather be slain than have the images stay in Jerusalem. Pilate relented and removed the images from Jerusalem.

⁷⁵ Pontius Pilate was procurator from 27-37 AD. He carried these images to Jerusalem in c. 27 AD, shortly after he moved his quarters from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

⁷⁶ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II, ix, 4.

⁷⁷ That is, 34 miles long. This may be the ancient aqueduct that was found to the South of Jerusalem. Pilate may have simply restored an aqueduct that was built at the time of Solomon. This work was done in the years 30-37 AD

⁷⁸ That is, make outcry like they did when they demanded that Pilate crucify Christ (Matthew 27:21-24).

Many Jews were beaten and many of them perished in consequence of the blows; while many others were trampled under foot by their own countrymen in their flight, and thus lost their lives. But the multitude, overawed by the fate of those who were slain, held their peace'. In addition to these the same author records many other tumults which were stirred up in Jerusalem itself. Josephus shows⁷⁹ that from that time sedition, wars and mischievous plots followed each other in quick succession, and never ceased in the city and in all Judea until finally the siege of Vespasian overwhelmed them. Thus the divine vengeance overtook the Jews for the crimes which they dared to commit against Christ".

"It is worthy of note that Pilate himself, who was governor in the time of our Savior, is reported to have fallen into such misfortunes under Caius, whose times we are recording, that he was forced to become his own murderer and executioner⁸⁰. And thus divine vengeance, as it seems, was not long in overtaking him. This is stated by those Greek historians who have recorded the Olympiads, together with the respective events, which have taken place in each period".

A brief description of Pilate's appearance before Caesar is recorded⁸¹ in the history archives of Edessa, the Persian city, where extensive Christian activity occurred in the 1st Century. In this account, Peter was speaking to the people of Rome about 54 AD. Pilate was quite knowledgeable about everything that had happened at the Crucifixion.

"You see the wonderful works, which accompany and follow these words. It has not been long since He ascended to His Father, and see how His Gospel has winged its flight through the whole creation. You saw the sun become darkened at His death; you yourselves are witnesses⁸². The earth, moreover, quaked when He was slain, and the veil was torn at His death. Concerning these things the governor Pilate also was witness. He himself sent and made them known to Caesar, and these things, plus other things, were read before him, and before the princes of your city. On this account Caesar was angry against Pilate because he had unjustly listened to the persuasion of the Jews; and for this reason he took away from him the authority, which he had given to him. This same thing was published and known in all the dominion of the Romans. What Pilate saw and made known to Caesar and to your honorable senate, the same do I preach and declare, as do my fellow-apostles. You know that Pilate could not have written to the imperial government of that which did not take place and which he had not seen with his own eyes; but that which did take place and was actually done — this it was that he wrote and made known. Moreover, the guards of the sepulcher also were witnesses of those things, which took place there; they became as dead men. When those guards were questioned before Pilate, they confessed before him how large a bribe the chief-priests of the Jews had given them, so that they

⁷⁹ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, II, ix-xiv.

⁸⁰ Pilate was banished to Vienne in Gaul, where a monument is still shown as Pilate's tomb. According to local tradition, he committed suicide upon the mountain near Lake Lucerne, which bears his name. See footnote 1, page 110, "Eusebius, Church History, II, vii.", II, 28-29, in Philip Schaff, Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, Volume I, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994.

⁸¹ "The Teaching of Simon Cephas in the City of Rome", Ancient Syriac Documents, in Memoirs of Edessa, The Ante Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

⁸² That is, when the sun was darkened at the Crucifixion (Luke 23:44-45), it was darkened all over the world, including at Rome.

might say that we His disciples had stolen the corpse of Christ. You have heard many things; if you are not willing to be persuaded by those things, which you have heard, at least be persuaded by the mighty-works, which you see, which are done by His Name”.

Pilate’s wife, Claudia Procula, on the other hand, came to believe in Christ and lived an ascetic life along with others of the Holy Women⁸³. She had sent word to her husband during Jesus’ trial to “have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him” (Matthew 27:19).

Mary Magdalene was renowned in the Early Church for her evangelistic efforts, both in Rome and later in Ephesus working with the Apostle John, and was referred to as “Equal to the Apostles”⁸⁴.

⁸³ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 27.

⁸⁴ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 22.

Good Friday Third Hour Prayers

The Crucifixion

This Study of the Crucifixion begins with the events following the death sentence given to Jesus by Pontius Pilate, and ends at about the Sixth Hour just before the darkness covers the earth. Thus this Study covers the Good Friday events from about the Third Hour to about the Sixth Hour. Some of the Readings for Holy Thursday Evening are included as they fall within this time frame.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus: Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20, John 19:2-5
6th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: Mark 15:16-32 "The Crucifixion"
Good Friday Third Hour Gospel: Mark 15:16-41 "The Crucifixion"

Jesus was mocked by the Roman soldiers three times: once during His appearance before Herod (Luke 23:11), again after Pilate scourged and ridiculed Him (John 19:1-5) and again after Pilate sentenced Him just before He was about to be led away for crucifixion (Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-21)

The 1st Mocking by Herod

“Then Herod questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. The chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked *Him*, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That same day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other” (Luke 23:9-12).

The 2nd Mocking After Pilate Scourged Him

“So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *Him*. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they struck⁸⁵ Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him’. Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And *Pilate* said to them, ‘Behold the Man!’” (John 19:1-5)

The 3rd Mocking After He Was Condemned

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ Then they spit on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. When they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified” (Matthew 27:27-31).

Cyril of Jerusalem noted⁸⁶ the significance of the crown of thorns placed on Jesus’ head by the soldiers. The crown was a mystery concerning the remission of sins and a release from the curse.

⁸⁵ That is, they slapped Him with the palm of their hands.

⁸⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 17.

“But the soldiers who crowd around mock Him, and their Lord becomes a sport to them, and upon their Master they make jests. ‘When they looked on Me, they shook their heads’ (Psalm 109:25). Yet the figure of kingly state appears; for though in mockery, yet they bend the knee. Before they crucify Him, the soldiers put on Him a purple robe, and set a crown on His head, though it is of thorns. Soldiers proclaim every king; and soldiers also must in a figure crown Jesus. For this cause the Scripture says in the Canticles, ‘Go forth, daughters of Jerusalem, and look upon King Solomon in the crown wherewith His mother crowned Him’ (Canticles 3:11). And the crown itself was a mystery; for it was a remission of sins, a release from the curse”.

Cyril of Jerusalem continued to say⁸⁷ that the events of the Cross were part of the imagery of the wine-press mentioned in the Scriptures, as was the crown of thorns.

“When He was judged before Pilate, He was clothed in red; for there they put on Him a purple robe. Isaiah wrote, ‘Who is this that comes from Edom; the redness of His garments from Bozrah, who is this who in dishonor wears purple? Why are Your garments red, and Your raiment as from a trodden wine-press?’ (Isaiah 63:1-2). But He answers and says, ‘All day long have I stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and contradicting people’” (Isaiah 65:2 LXX).

“Rightly did the Prophet Isaiah bewail you, saying, ‘My well-beloved had a vineyard in a hill in a fruitful place. And I waited, he says, that it should bring forth grapes; I thirsted that it should give wine. But it brought forth thorns’ (Isaiah 5:1-2). For you see the crown, wherewith I am adorned”.

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁸ that one can see the work of the devil in these proceedings and that it was he who was the power that crucified Christ (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

“The devil entered in triumph into everyone as though on some signal. The Jews were pining with envy and jealousy and were mad against Him; as to the soldiers, what caused their behavior? Is it not clear that it was the devil that was then entering in fury into the hearts of everyone? They made a pleasure of their insults against Him, being a savage and ruthless sort. When they ought to have been awestruck, when they ought to have wept, they did not; but on the contrary, they were spiteful, and insolent. Perhaps they were also seeking to please the Jews, or they may have done all in conformity to their own evil nature”.

Cyril of Jerusalem also stated⁸⁹ that while the things that Christ endured were incredible, all these things were an example for us as we take up our cross.

“The High-priest having questioned Him, and heard the truth, is angry; and the wicked officer of wicked men strikes Him; and the countenance, which had shone as the sun at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9), endured to be struck by lawless hands. Others also come and spit on the face of Him, Who by spit had healed the man who was blind from his birth (John 9:6-7). Do you thus repay the Lord? This people is foolish and unwise (Deuteronomy 32:6). The Prophet, greatly wondering, says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ (Isaiah 53:1) for the thing is incredible, that God, the Son of God, and the Arm of the Lord, should

⁸⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 27, 29.

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVII, 1

⁸⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 13.

suffer such things. In order that they who are being saved may believe, the Holy Spirit writes before, in the person of Christ⁹⁰, who says, ‘I gave My back to the scourges and My cheeks to smiting’. And My face I turned not away from the shame of spitting (Isaiah 50:6). He was saying, as it were, ‘Though knowing beforehand that they will strike Me, I did not even turn My cheek aside. For how should I have nerved My disciples against death for truth’s sake, had I Myself dreaded this?’ I said, ‘He that loves his life shall lose it’ (John 12:25): if I had loved My life, how was I to teach without practicing what I taught? First then, being Himself God, He endured to suffer these things at the hands of men; that after this, we men, when we suffer such things at the hands of men for His sake, might not be ashamed. You see that of these things also the prophets have clearly written beforehand”.

John Chrysostom commented⁹¹ on the injustice at Christ’s “trial” to show how we might act if we encounter the same kind of situation:

“Let us not merely read of these things, but bear them in mind: the crown of thorns, the robe, the reed, the blows, the smiting on the cheek, the spitting. These things, if continually meditated on, are sufficient to take down all anger. If we are mocked, if we suffer injustice, let us still say, ‘the servant is not greater than his Lord’ (John 13:16). On this account He bore all these things in order that we might walk in His footsteps, and endure this mocking which disturbs more than does any other kind of reproach. He not only bore these things, but also used every means to save and deliver from the appointed punishment those who did them. He sent the Apostles for their salvation, and you hear them saying that, ‘we know that you did it in ignorance’ (Acts 3:17, see also 3:25-26); and by these means they drew them to repentance. This let us also imitate.”

“All these things, therefore, let us practice in our actions; for if we do not act rightly in these, we have come to no purpose and we have come in vain into the world. Or rather we have come to our harm, for faith is not sufficient to bring men into the Kingdom; it even has power in this way most to condemn those who exhibit a sick life. For ‘that servant who knew His Master’s Will and did not prepare himself or do according to His Will, shall be beaten with many stripes’ (Luke 12:47). And again, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin’ (John 15:22). What excuse then shall we have, who have been set within the palace and deemed worthy to peek and enter into the sanctuary, and have been made partakers of the releasing mysteries?”

⁹⁰ Cyril: “For He who then spoke these things, was afterward Himself an actor in them”.

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXIV, 3.

Good Friday Third Hour Reading: Isaiah 50:4-11 "The Scourging and the Spitting"

The Church Fathers have used these words from Isaiah regarding Christ's trial to teach us how Satan attempts to torment us like he did Christ. First he gets us attached to the things of this life; then he takes those things away to try to lead us away from God as we struggle to recover the things of this life. The things of this life are called "the passions", and involve everything associated with love of life and pleasure. The Jewish leaders, the soldiers and the mob were all under the sway of their passions as they orchestrated the Crucifixion at the urging of their master (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

A Time to Speak: Isaiah 50:4-5

The text from Isaiah reads:

"The Lord *even* God gives Me the tongue of instruction, to know when it is fit to speak a word. He has appointed for Me early, and He has given Me an ear to hear. And the instruction of the Lord, even the Lord, opens My ears, and I do not disobey, nor dispute" (Isaiah 50:4-7 LXX).

Isaiah wrote concerning Christ's trial before Pilate and Herod: "And He, because of His affliction, opens not His mouth: He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so He opens not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7 LXX). But why, we might ask, did He keep silent?

Ambrose of Milan wrote⁹² about the wisdom of being silent. From his observations, he saw many people fall into sin by speaking, but rarely by being silent. People don't know how to be silent, even when speaking won't do any good. Knowing when to speak is wisdom from God, and Jesus used this wisdom well during His trial. Saints through the ages have loved to keep silence, knowing that it was Divine protection to be hidden from the scourge of one's own tongue.

"What we ought to learn before everything else is to be silent, that we may be able to speak. My voice may condemn me, before that of another acquits me; for it is written: 'By your words you shall be condemned' (Matthew 12:37). What need is there that you should hasten to undergo the danger of condemnation by speaking, when you can be safer by keeping silent? How many have I seen to fall into sin by speaking, but scarcely one by keeping silent; and so it is more difficult to know how to keep silent than how to speak. I know that most persons speak because they do not know how to keep silent. It is seldom that anyone is silent even when speaking profits him nothing. He is wise, then, who knows how to keep silent. Lastly, the Wisdom of God said: 'The Lord has given to me the tongue of learning that I should know when it is good to speak' (Isaiah 50:4). Justly, then, is he wise who has received of the Lord to know when he ought to speak. Wherefore the Scripture says well, 'A wise man will keep silence until there is opportunity'" (Ecclesiasticus 20:7 LXX).

"Therefore the saints of the Lord loved to keep silence, because they knew that a man's voice is often the utterance of sin, and a man's speech is the beginning of human error. Lastly, the Saint of the Lord said: 'I said, I will take

⁹² Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, ii, 5-6.

heed to my ways that I offend not in my tongue' (Psalm 39:1). He knew that it was a mark of the divine protection for a man to be hid from the scourge of his own tongue. We are chastised by the silent reproaches of our thoughts, and by the judgment of conscience. We are chastised also by the lash of our own voice, when we say things whereby our soul is mortally injured, and our mind is sorely wounded. But who is there that has his heart clean from the impurities of sin, and does not offend in his tongue? So as he saw there was no one who could keep his mouth free from evil speaking, he laid upon himself the law of innocence by a rule of silence, with a view to avoiding by silence that fault which he could with difficulty escape in speaking".

John Chrysostom wrote⁹³ how there is a spiritual dimension to hearing and speaking. This Christ had at His trial, and the prophets had this also. As we are able to obtain access to this, we also have "the mind of Christ"

What eye has not seen what God prepared?' For who among men saw the things which were about to be dispensed? Neither then has 'the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man' (Isaiah 64:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9). For if the Prophets spoke of it, how said he, 'Ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man?' It did not enter; for not of himself alone is he speaking, but of the whole human race. The Prophets heard; but the prophetic ear was not the ear 'of man', for not as men did they hear, but as Prophets. The same was true with Christ during His trial. Isaiah said, 'He has added unto me an ear to hear' (Isaiah 50:4 LXX), meaning by 'addition' that which was from the Spirit. From this, it was plain that before hearing it had not entered into the heart of man. For using the gift of the Spirit, the heart of the Prophets was not the heart of man, but a spiritual heart. Also Paul said, 'We have the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16), as if he would say, 'When we had the blessing of the Spirit and learned the things which no man can speak, no one of us conceived them in his mind. How should we, since not even angels know them?'

"What kind of things then are these? That by the foolishness of preaching He shall overcome the world, and the nations shall be brought in, and there shall be reconciliation of God with men, and so great blessings shall come upon us!"

He Gave His Back to the Scourges: Isaiah 50:6-7

The text from Isaiah reads:

"I gave My back to scourges, and My cheeks to blows; and I turned not away My face from the shame of spitting. But the Lord God became My helper; therefore I was not ashamed, but I set My face as a solid rock; and I know that I shall never be ashamed, for He that has justified Me draws near" (Isaiah 50:6-8 LXX).

Our Lord gave us an example of how suffering unjustly, but patiently, can lead to our glory. The Lord had said, "Do not resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matthew 5:39-41). Paul added to this, "Live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves,

⁹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VII, 7.

but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’, says the Lord. Therefore, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head’ (Proverbs 25:21-22). ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’” (Romans 12:19-21).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated that when we do this, as Jesus did, then it is that we tread on serpents and scorpions. As Jesus said to the Seventy as they returned from healing the sick and casting out demons, “Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:19-20). As we take up our Cross, then we trample, because it is then that we defy the things of this world. Athanasius said⁹⁴,

“Thus our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes before us, when He would show men how to suffer. When He was smitten, He bore it patiently; being reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but He gave His back to the whips, and His cheeks to punching, and turned not His face from spitting. At last, He was willingly led to death, that we might behold in Him the image of all that is virtuous and immortal, and that we, conducting ourselves after these examples, might truly tread on serpents and scorpions, and on all the power of the enemy”.

Jerome gave⁹⁵ some examples of the contrary:

“One hour’s debauch made Noah uncover his nakedness, which through sixty years of sobriety he had kept covered. Lot in a fit of intoxication unwittingly adds incest to incontinence, and wine overcomes the man whom Sodom failed to conquer. He, Who gave His back to the whips, condemns a bishop, that is a striker. And when He was reviled, He reviled not again”.

Walk in the Light of Your Fire: Isaiah 50:8-11

The “fire” referred to here is the passions. Those who are controlled by their passions have a “light” by which they order their life. It may seem as if this “order” is wildly out of control at times, but unseen masters are pulling the strings. These same masters are the same ones who orchestrated the Crucifixion of Christ.

The text from Isaiah reads:

“Who is he that pleads with me? Let him stand up against me at the same time: yea, who is he that pleads with me? Let him draw near to me. Behold, the Lord, the Lord, will help me; who will hurt me? Behold, all you shall grow old as a garment, and a moth shall devour you. Who is among you that fears the Lord? Let him listen to the voice of His Servant: you that walk in darkness, and have no light, trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon God. Behold, you all kindle a fire, and feed a flame: walk in the light of your fire, and in the flame, which you have kindled. This has happened to you for my sake; you shall lie down in sorrow” (Isaiah 50:8-11 LXX).

⁹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, X, 7.

⁹⁵ Jerome, Letters, LXIX, 9.

Irenaeus wrote⁹⁶ that Isaiah's prophecy predicted that there would be a reaction by the whole earth against the Church, just as there would be a reaction by the whole earth at the Second Coming. The words "stand opposite", "draw near", and "lie down in sorrow" are very similar to the words that the Lord used in His illustration of separating sheep from goats on Judgment Day (Matthew 25:32-46).

The prophets said, 'The Lord has reigned; let the people be enraged: [even] He who sits upon the cherubim; let the earth be moved' (Psalm 99:1). These prophets were thus predicting (1) that wrath from all nations, which after His ascension came upon those who believed in Him, with the movement of the whole earth against the Church. And (2) the fact that, when He comes from heaven with His mighty angels, the whole earth shall be shaken, as He Himself declares, 'There shall be a great earthquake, such as has not been from the beginning' (Revelation 16:18, Luke 21:25-28). And again, when one says, 'Whoever is judged, let him stand opposite; and whoever is justified, let him draw near to the servant of God' (Isaiah 50:8 loosely). Again, 'Woe unto you, for you shall wax old as does a garment, and the moth shall eat you up' (Isaiah 50:9); and, 'All flesh shall be humbled, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in the highest' (Isaiah 2:11). It is thus indicated that, after His passion and ascension, God shall cast down under His feet all who were opposed to Him, and He shall be exalted above all, and there shall be no one who can be justified or compared to Him.

When Isaiah referred to "the Lord's Servant", referring to Christ, he is speaking of the Lord's humanity. Against Him, the passions of the Jewish leaders were kindled and fed as a fire, and those caught up by this fire had the light of their passions, instead of the Light of God, to walk by. This led to their demise, as was evident in c. 70 AD.

Gregory the Theologian spoke⁹⁷ of two kinds of light. One is the Light of God that illumines us, and which is mentioned many times in the Scriptures. Then there is the "light" from the flame of our passions, which was "illuminating" those who crucified Christ. To counteract this flame, there is both a cleansing fire and an avenging fire.

"A light for the righteous springs up, and its partner is joyful gladness (Psalm 97:11). 'The light of the righteous is everlasting' (Proverbs 13:9); and 'You are shining wondrously from the everlasting mountains' (Psalm 76:4 LXX) is said to God by the Angelic powers which aid our efforts after good".

"And you have heard David's words; 'The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom then shall I fear?' (Psalm 27:1) And now he asks that the Light and the Truth may be sent forth for him (Psalm 43:3), now giving thanks that he has a share in it, in that the Light of God is marked upon him (Psalm 4:6-7). That is, that the signs of the illumination given are impressed upon him and recognized".

"One light alone let us shun — that which is the offspring of the baleful fire; let us not walk in the light of our fire, and in the flame which we have kindled (Isaiah 50:11). I know a cleansing fire which Christ came to send upon the earth (Luke 12:49), and He Himself is mystically called a Fire. This Fire takes away whatever is material and of evil habit; and this He desires to kindle with all speed, for He longs for speed in doing us good, since He gives us even

⁹⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxiii, 13.

⁹⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 36.

coals of fire (Isaiah 47:14 LXX) to help us. I know also a fire, which is not cleansing, but avenging. This is either that fire of Sodom (Genesis 19:24), which He pours down on all sinners (Psalm 11:6), mingled with brimstone and storms, or that which is prepared for the Devil and his Angels (Matthew 25:41). Or it is that which proceeds from the face of the Lord, and shall burn up his enemies round about (Psalm 97:3). There is one even more fearful still than these, the unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43-48), which is ranged with the worm that doesn't die, but is eternal for the wicked. For all these belong to the destroying power”.

John Cassian stated⁹⁸ that the devil uses worldly cares as a scourge to torment us and sever us from spiritual delights. In this way, we become bound by the cords of our own sins and walk in the flame of our own fire.

“As the devil holds our soul fast in the labors for these worldly goods, when he wants to sever us from spiritual delights, he vexes us by diminishing these and depriving us of them. When the lightness of His burden has become loathsome to us through the evil of a corrupt desire, and when we are caught in the chains of that property and substance, which we kept for our comfort and solace, he torments us with the scourges of worldly cares. For ‘each one is bound by the cords of his own sins’ (Proverbs 5:22), and hears from the prophet, ‘Behold all you that kindle a fire, encompassed with flames, walk in the light of your fire, and in the flames which you have kindled’ (Isaiah 50:11). Solomon is witness to this, ‘Each man shall thereby be punished, whereby he has sinned’ (Wisdom 11:16 LXX). The pleasures, which we enjoy, becomes a torment to us, and the delights and enjoyments of this flesh, turn like executioners upon their originator. One who is supported by his former wealth and property is sure not to admit perfect humility of heart”.

Ambrose of Milan spoke⁹⁹ of the flame of our fire as a youthful lust that we kindle. He encouraged us to cast it out of our mind and not to feed it with the fuel of luxury.

“Let us pass over this fire of youthful lust as though it were following us, though indeed it follows not behind us, but within our selves. We wish for the most part to flee, but if we do not wholly cast it out of our mind, we rather take it up than forsake it. Let us then spring over it, lest it be said to us, ‘Walk in the flame of your fire, which you have kindled for yourselves’ (Isaiah 50:11). For as he who “takes fire into his bosom burns his clothes,” so he who walks upon fiery coals must of necessity burn his feet, as it is written, ‘Can one walk upon coals of fire and not burn his feet?’ (Proverbs 6:28) This fire is dangerous; let us then not feed it with the fuel of luxury”.

The History of Crucifixion as a Means of Punishment

Crucifixion was in use¹⁰⁰ at least as early as 1500 BC, and was in use in Egypt prior to the Exodus. The Patriarch Joseph prophesied that Pharaoh's chief baker would be crucified. “Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you” (Genesis 40:19). Crucifixion at that time was not done to cause

⁹⁸ John Cassian, *Conferences*, III, xxiv, 24.

⁹⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance*, I, xiv, 75-76.

¹⁰⁰ Merrill Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, pp 229.

pain, but to generate ridicule. Normal procedure was first to kill the victim, then to tie the hands of the victim's body to an upright pole to let the body rot in the sun. Sometimes crucifixion also implied the placing of the victim's head on top of a separate pole as was the case with the chief baker in Joseph's day. The word usually translated "hang" means crucifixion and not hanging by the neck as in the Western United States tradition. Similarly, the 75-foot high "gallows" that Haman built for Mordecai during the Captivity (Esther 7:9-10) was intended for crucifixion, not hanging by the neck.

During the Exodus, when Balaam taught Balak, the king of Moab, to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel (Revelation 2:14), the Lord's punishment for those who were joined to the Moabite prostitutes was crucifixion. The offenders were first killed, then crucified.

"Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel'. So Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor'" (Numbers 25:1-5).

The Lord's instructions regarding crucifixion, in anticipation of the crucifixion of His Son, was not to leave the victim hang on the tree overnight.

"If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day. So that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

In Roman times, crucifixion was done either by nails driven through the wrists, or by tying the victim to the cross with cords. When nails were used, the victim died quicker, and the initial pain was more pronounced. When cords were used, it took days for the victim to die of sheer exhaustion, and the eventual pain was greater.

There was usually a strong peg that projected out of the central stem of the cross, on which the feet of the victim could rest. This had the effect of prolonging death. If the legs of the victim were broken, as was done to the two thieves (John 19:31), death came quickly as the victim was strangled by his own collarbone. In Jesus' case, His legs weren't broken, but He was weakened considerably by the scourging¹⁰¹. This may have been why Jesus died before the two thieves. Since victims were compelled to carry their own cross, and since Jesus was unable to do so (Mark 15:21), the scourging had evidently left Him very weak, and He had probably lost several units of blood.

¹⁰¹ "Scourging" was done with a whip made of sharp pieces of metal or bone at the end short leather cords. According to Hebrew custom, it was illegal to give more than 39 lashes, since forty lashes was considered fatal. The Apostle Paul received 39 lashes five times from the Jewish leaders (2 Corinthians 11:24). Each "lash" created a number of "stripes" as the sharp pieces of metal dug into the prisoner's back, resulting in profuse pain and bleeding. Following the scourging, Jesus was left standing in a pool of His own blood. This scourging left Jesus very weak, such that He could not carry His Cross to Golgotha.

Before the nailing or binding with cords took place, the victim was often given a medicated cup to confuse the senses and deaden the pain. Jesus refused to drink this (Matthew 27:34) in order that His senses might be clear.

The Romans used crucifixion as a tool in terrorizing the city during the siege of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD. Some of the Jews in the city sought to escape to the Romans, hoping to find some safety from the horrors of the city by way of their surrender; but they experienced something quite different¹⁰² when they were crucified in jest.

“They were first whipped and then tortured with all sorts of tortures before they died, and were then crucified outside the walls of the city. So the soldiers, out of wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for crosses, and crosses wanting for bodies. Roman soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified them at the rate of 500 per day”.

In the 4th Century AD, the Emperor Constantine outlawed crucifixion as a means of punishment, due to his increasing reverence for the Cross.

Shapes of Crosses

The use of the Cross, as a symbol or sign, did not first appear in New Testament times. Other pagan cultures had used it before¹⁰³. For example, a cross-shaped emblem was used in Egypt, Nineveh and Phoenicia, among other countries. These crosses were shaped like the Modern Greek Cross with equal length arms.

Other crosses used are the X-shaped “St. Andrew Cross”, so called because the Apostle Andrew was crucified on one of that shape. The St. Andrew Cross is very prominently displayed on the British flag today. Also used has been the Tee-shaped “St. Anthony Cross”, supposedly derived from the crutch or walking stick of Anthony the Great¹⁰⁴. During the middle Ages in Europe the Celtic Cross, having a circle behind the crossbeam, was used a lot, and carved in stone in many places. Most commonly used in the West is the Latin Cross, which is the style displayed on most Western Churches.

For executions in Roman times, a “Simple Cross” was sometimes used. This was a plain vertical stake where the victim’s hands were tied or nailed above his head. The Greek word for cross, *stauros*, means “an upright stake” and does not imply a crossbeam. Thus a “cross” did not have to have a crossbeam, and referring to the Cross that Jesus died on as “a tree” (1 Peter 2:24, Galatians 3:13) is perfectly consistent with the meaning of *stauros*.

Many comments have been made by the Church Fathers in comparing the “tree” that Christ died on with the “tree” that caused mankind to fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-16). By the “tree” in the Garden, Satan set a trap for Adam and caused him to fall. By the “tree” of the Cross, God also set a trap for Satan. If Satan had known what would result from this trap, he “would not have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

¹⁰² Josephus, Wars of the Jews, V, xi, 1.

¹⁰³ Merrill Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, pp 227.

¹⁰⁴ Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, January 17.

Simon of Cyrene Carries Jesus' Cross: Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26

“Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross” (Mark 15:21).

We might ask, “Who is Simon of Cyrene?” and “Why do three of the four Gospel writers mention Simon of Cyrene (in North Africa) as being present at the Crucifixion, and as being pressed into service to carry Jesus' cross?” Evidently many people that they were addressing, including Theophilus (Luke 1:1-3, Acts 1:1-3), the governor of Antioch, knew who Simon was.

As part of the spread of the Early Church, Luke mentions men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who were among those scattered at the death of Stephen in 31 AD, and who began preaching to the Greek speaking Gentiles in Antioch also. Over the span of a few years, a great number had believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21). From the Scriptures, the men we know who were from Cyrene (in Northern Africa) and from the island of Cyprus were:

NAME	FROM	Later Bishop of	Notes, N. T. References
Simon	Cyrene	?	Mark 15:21, Acts 13:1?
Rufus	Cyrene	Thebes	Mark 15:21, Romans 16:13
Alexander	Cyrene	heretic	Mark 15:21, 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 4:14
Lucius	Cyrene	Laodicea	Acts 13:1, Romans 16:21
Aristobulus	Cyprus	Britain	Barnabas' brother; Peter's father-in-law; Romans 16:10
Barnabas	Cyprus	Cyprus	Acts 4:36-37, 9:26-28, 12-15

All of the above, except Simon and Alexander, were members of the original Seventy (Luke 10:1-20) and were referred to, in the early Church, as the “lesser apostles” as opposed to the Twelve who were called the “great apostles.” In addition, the name Simon of Cyrene is a Greek name that is equivalent to the Hebrew name “Simeon.” Simeon, called Niger, or black (Acts 13:1), may be the same person as Simon of Cyrene, being a black man coming from North Africa.

Of the six people listed above, all of the first five may have been involved in starting the church in Antioch. John Chrysostom noted¹⁰⁵ that when the text states, “the hand of the Lord was with them” (Acts 11:21), this means that the men from Cyprus and Cyrene performed miracles, further suggesting that the Seventy were involved. Barnabas was not involved initially, but when the news of the great number of people (including Gentiles) turning to the Lord reached the church in Jerusalem, James and the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to investigate. This was similar to the sending of Peter and John to chrismate the converts of Deacon Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:14) and the Lord sending Peter to chrismate and baptize Cornelius and those with him (Acts 10:19-21, 44-48). Barnabas may have been chosen to go because his brother Aristobulus was involved.

¹⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXV.

Thus it is understandable that the Gospel writers mentioned Simon of Cyrene as carrying Jesus' Cross. He was a prominent person, and he was widely known throughout the Early Church.

The Women Lament: Luke 23:27-31

“And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, ‘Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?’” (Luke 23:27-31)

The above is a proverb that compares Jesus' suffering to that of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD. If the innocent Jesus (the green wood) suffered so much, the sufferings of guilty Jerusalem (the dry wood) will be that much greater. For details of the sufferings of Jerusalem, see the Study for Holy Monday Evening.

Theophylact stated¹⁰⁶ that Christ did not need lamentation for what He was doing, but praise. The women of Jerusalem, who were caught up in the sins of the Jewish leaders, were the ones to be lamented for what they would suffer later.

“The women wept for the Lord as if something terrible had befallen Him, showing their own compassion. But He did not accept their lament, and instead He seemed to rebuke them. For He suffered willingly! Lamentation is not appropriate for Him, Who suffered willingly for the salvation of all human nature; instead, praise and acclamation are His due”.

“But was He really rebuking them? No! He was exhorting them to consider the catastrophes that were coming and to mourn for the people who will then suffer. Then, women will cook their own children for food without a tear of remorse¹⁰⁷, and the belly that had carried the child will wretchedly welcome back the thing which it had borne”.

“If the Romans have done these things to Me, the Green Tree, ever-flourishing on account of My Divinity, laden with the fruits of My teachings, which nourish all men, what will the Romans not do to you, the Jewish people, the dry tree, barren of all righteousness and bearing no fruit? Had there been any amount of living sap of goodness within you, you might have been found deserving of a little bit of mercy. But now you will be like dry wood that is cast into the furnace and destroyed”.

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹⁰⁸ that the cruelty of the Roman officers is but a prelude to their cruelty to Israel in the war that destroyed Jerusalem in c. 70 AD. That is, Israel would reap the same cruelty plus some in the destruction of Jerusalem.

“He raised the dead to life, He cleansed the lepers, He healed the blind. But though these were His works, yet the Roman officers, or rather Pilate who

¹⁰⁶ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 307-8.

¹⁰⁷ See Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, iii, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 151, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 606-607.

condemned Him, inflicted upon Him these cruel mockeries. Therefore when He says, the Roman commanders have inflicted upon Me such things, though they see Me adorned with such great glory, what will they do to Israel, perceiving him to be a dry and fruitless stock? In Israel, they will see nothing admirable. Plainly they will burn him with fire, without showing him mercy; he will suffer the cruelties prompted by savage rage. Such were the miseries into which Israel fell when God, Who judges righteously, exacted of them the punishment for their wickedness against Christ”.

Josephus describes the fury of the Roman soldiers against the Jews; and their greedy neighbors also showed them no mercy. Not even the Temple was spared but was used as a battleground by these warring parties. Worshipers were killed in front of the altar and hundreds of dead were strewn within the Temple. Josephus laments the horrible situation:

“O most wretched city¹⁰⁹, what misery so great as this from the Romans did you ever suffer, when they came to purify you from your intestine hatred! For you could be no longer a place fit for God, nor could you long continue in being, after you had been a sepulcher for the bodies of your own people, and had made the holy house a burying-place in this civil war of yours”.

“It is therefore impossible¹¹⁰ to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall therefore speak my mind at once here briefly - that neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did an age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world” (cf. Acts 2:40).

This fury against the Jews was so intense, that even though the Roman General Titus had wanted to spare the Temple from destruction¹¹¹, there was nothing he could do to prevent it. The animosity of the soldiers toward the Jews was just too intense.

Golgotha, Burial Place of Adam: Matthew 27:33, Mark 15:22, Luke 23:33, John 19:17-18

“And when they had come to the place called Calvary¹¹², there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’. And they divided His garments and cast lots” (Luke 23:33-34).

The other Gospel writers stated: “And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull” (Mark 15:22). “And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha” (John 19:17). Golgotha was known as the Place of a Skull both because the hill resembled a skull, and because human remains were often seen there, leftovers from bodies that were left to rot in the sun.

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹¹³ that when Abraham led his son, Isaac, up to one of the mountains of Moriah (Genesis 22:2), he had Isaac carry the wood for the sacrifice, which

¹⁰⁹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, i, 3.

¹¹⁰ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, x, 5.

¹¹¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI, iv, 6-7.

¹¹² The English word “Calvary” comes from the Latin word for skull, *calvaria*.

¹¹³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Homily 151, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 606.

foreshadowed Christ carrying His Cross. Just as Christ was doing the Will of His Father (Matthew 26:42), so also were Abraham and Isaac. The “mountains of Moriah” were the same location where Christ was later crucified. Thus the sacrifice of Isaac foreshadows that of Christ.

The Lord had told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountaintop, but this command was contrary to the Lord’s Law (which forbade human sacrifice) and was seemingly contrary to the Lord’s promise that his posterity would be numbered through Isaac. In obeying, Abraham told his two servants that he and Isaac were going to worship the Lord on the mountaintop and then return (Genesis 22:5). Abraham concluded that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19). Josephus stated¹¹⁴ that Isaac shared Abraham’s faith and willingly climbed up on the altar to be sacrificed.

Theophylact stated¹¹⁵ that there is a tradition that has come down to us from the holy fathers that Adam had been buried in this place near Golgotha. John Chrysostom also acknowledged¹¹⁶ that this tradition had come down to his generation. By being crucified there, the Lord healed both the sin and the death of Adam. At the place where death began, there death was destroyed.

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹¹⁷ that Golgotha was the center of the earth because here our sins were nailed to the Cross.

“He stretched out His hands on the Cross, that He might embrace the ends of the world. For this Golgotha is the very center of the earth, as the Prophet Asaph said, ‘You have wrought salvation in the midst of the earth’ (Psalm 74:12 LXX). He stretched forth human hands, who by His spiritual hands had established the heaven. They were fastened with nails, that His manhood, which bore the sins of men, having been nailed to the tree, and having died, sin might die with it, and we might rise again in righteousness. Since by one man came death, by One Man came also life (Romans 5:12, 17); by One Man, the Savior, dying of His own accord. Remember what He said, ‘I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again’” (John 10:18).

Cyril of Jerusalem also noted¹¹⁸ how a cross and wood had been used in prophetic imagery for over 1500 years.

“This was the figure, which Moses completed by fixing the serpent to a cross that whoever had been bitten by the living serpent, and looked to the brazen serpent, might be saved by believing (Numbers 21:9, John 3:14). Does then the brazen serpent save when crucified, and shall not the Son of God incarnate save when crucified also? On each occasion life comes by means of wood. In the time of Noah, the preservation of life was by an ark of wood (Genesis 6:13-17). In the time of Moses the sea, on beholding the emblematic rod, withdrew from him who

¹¹⁴ Josephus, Antiquities, I, xiii, 4.

¹¹⁵ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 134.

Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 308.

¹¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

¹¹⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 27-29.

¹¹⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 20.

struck it (Exodus 14:15-27). Is then Moses' rod mighty, and is the Cross of the Savior powerless?"

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹¹⁹ that the Jewish leaders claimed to be Moses' disciples, but yet they had no understanding of what Moses said.

"You heard your great chieftain Moses foretelling the savageness of your attacks. He said, 'Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life' (Deuteronomy 28:66 LXX). You shall see, that is, Him, Who is the cause of life, or rather Life itself, hung on a tree. And how then did you entirely disregard the prophecy of Moses, of whom you made so great boast? For we have heard you expressly declare, 'We are Moses' disciples'".

Cyril of Jerusalem addressed¹²⁰ the problem of people denying the Faith during persecution, which was a big issue in his day. He encouraged people not to fear crucifixion, since they would be simply returning the favor to their King. He noted that the Head of the Church was crucified at the "Place of the Skull", or Golgotha. The Prophets foretold this.

"Do not recant the Faith in time of persecution. Rejoice not in the Cross in time of peace only, but hold fast the same Faith in time of persecution also. Don't be a friend of Jesus in time of peace, and His enemy in time of wars. You received remission of your sins, and the gifts of the King's spiritual bounty; when war shall come, strive nobly for your King. Jesus, the Sinless, was crucified for you; and will you not be crucified for Him who was crucified for you? You are not bestowing a favor, for you have first received. But you are returning a favor, repaying your debt to Him who was crucified for you on Golgotha. Now Golgotha is interpreted, 'the place of a skull' (Matthew 27:33). Who were they then, who prophetically named this spot Golgotha, in which Christ the true Head endured the Cross? As the Apostle says, 'Who is the Image of the Invisible God' (Colossians 1:15); and a little after, 'He is the Head of the body, the Church' (Colossians 1:18). And again, 'The Head of every man is Christ' (1 Corinthians 11:3); and again, 'Who is the Head all principality and power' (Colossians 2:10). The Head suffered in 'the place of the skull'. O wondrous prophetic appellation! The very name also reminds you, saying, 'Think not of the Crucified as of a mere man; He is the Head of all principality and power. That Head which was crucified is the Head of all power, and has for His Head the Father; for the Head of the man is Christ, and the Head of Christ is God'" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Gall to Drink: Mark 15:23, Matthew 27:34, Luke 23:36

"Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take *it*" (Mark 15:23). "They gave Him sour wine mingled with gall¹²¹ to drink. But when He had tasted *it*, He would not drink" (Matthew 27:34).

¹¹⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 151, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 609.

¹²⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 23.

¹²¹ Before the fastening to the cross took place, the victim was often given a medicated cup to confuse the senses and deaden the pain. Jesus refused to drink this (Matthew 27:34) in order that His senses might be clear. There may have been a number of ingredients in this medicated cup, including myrrh, gall, etc.

Severe loss of blood, such as from a violent scourging, can result in shock, and the victim begins to sweat, while his blood pressure falls and his pulse becomes slow and feeble. A secondary shock from tissue damage, such as the nail wounds as well as the bleeding from the scourging, often follows an hour or more later. A person in secondary shock is pale, weak, exhausted and may complain of thirst, which Jesus did. First aid for people in shock includes lowering the head, to help circulation to the brain, and administering water with a little salt to replace lost fluids. Instead, Jesus had His head erect and was offered vinegar. Theophylact stated¹²² that by offering Him a wine that had turned vinegary, they were mocking Him.

Justin Martyr pointed¹²³ to the prophecies of Christ's extreme thirst while on the Cross. The result was that the Jewish people, who continued to reject Christ, became extremely thirsty themselves.

“The statement, ‘My strength has become dry like a potsherd, and my tongue has clinged to my throat,’ (Psalm 22:15) was also a prophecy of what would be done by Him according to the Father's will. For the power of His strong word, by which He always confuted the Pharisees and Scribes, and your entire nation's teachers that questioned Him, had a cessation like a plentiful and strong spring. The waters of this spring have been turned off, when He kept silence, and chose to return no answer to anyone in the presence of Pilate”.

As Jesus was weakened severely by the wounds from the scourging, the nail wounds and the shock, He was unable to support Himself with His legs, and death came quickly. For the two thieves, who had not been scourged, death did not come quickly until after their legs were broken, and they were unable to support their weight any longer.

Dividing His Garments: Mark 15:24-25, Matthew 27:35-36, Luke 23:34, John 19:23-24

“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be’, that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says, ‘They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots’ (Psalm 22:18). Therefore the soldiers did these things” (John 19:23-24). Matthew adds, “Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there” (Matthew 27:35-36).

Mark states, “And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him” (Mark 15:24-25). John's Gospel states, however, that it was about the sixth hour when Jesus was crucified. “Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And Pilate said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ But they cried out, ‘Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!’” (John 19:14)

Matthew Henry cleared up¹²⁴ this apparent contradiction in John 19:14 by saying, “Some ancient Greek and Latin manuscripts read ‘about the third hour’, which agrees with Mark 15:25”.

¹²² Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 134.

¹²³ Justin Martyr, Dialog with Trypho, 102.

And it appears that he was already upon the cross before the darkness that began at the sixth hour (Matthew 27:45).

Theophylact stated¹²⁵ that by dividing up His garments as if they were dividing up, not His poor garments, but the garments of a king, they were mocking Him.

John Chrysostom noted¹²⁶ that the soldiers divided up the garments that had performed miracles. They didn't do this to the two thieves; only to Christ.

They parted the garments, by which such great miracles were done (Matthew 9:20, 14:36). But they wrought none now, Christ restraining His unspeakable power. This was no small addition to insult. They dared to do all this as if they were doing it to someone base, abject and the vilest of all men. To the thieves they did nothing of the kind, but to Christ they dared it all. They crucified Him in the midst of the thieves that He might share in their reputation.

“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’. And they divided His garments and cast lots” (Luke 23:33-34).

The statement Jesus made, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’, is not included in all New Testament manuscripts, and may be left out of some English translations. However, this statement is very similar to that made by Deacon Stephen just before He was stoned to death by the same Jewish leaders (Acts 7:60).

The Lord's words go right to the heart of what He had been saying for three years all over Israel: “love your enemies and forgive them”. Early in His public ministry, Jesus had said at the Sermon on the Mount,

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:44-47).

Pilate's Inscription: Mark 15:26, Matthew 27:37, Luke 23:38, John 19:19-22

Now Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, *and* Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, ‘Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews’, but

¹²⁴ Henry, Matthew, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, 1997, Matthew 19, V, 3, (2), [2].

¹²⁵ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 134.

¹²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVII, 1.

‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’. Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written’” (John 19:19-22).

Theophylact stated¹²⁷ that the title that Pilate put on the Cross, which was the accusation against Him (Matthew 27:37), was done to try to dishonor His fame and reputation. It made it appear that He was a fomenter of insurrection and had called Himself “king”, so that those who passed by would not pity Him, but would instead revile Him as a failed usurper.

Theophylact also stated¹²⁸ that this inscription would turn out to be truly ironic and would contain the truth in an uncanny way.

“The devil had caused the inscription detailing Jesus’ “crime” of insurrection in three languages, so that every passerby would know that He had been hung on the Cross because He had made Himself a king. Yet what was intended by the devil as an accusation became instead a triumphant symbol. The Romans, the most powerful nation, the Greeks, the wisest nation, and the Hebrews, the most God-fearing nation would all be placed under the kingship of Jesus and would acclaim Him. The devil, although wise in evil doing, did not understand that this would be the result”.

John Chrysostom stated¹²⁹ that the title that Pilate put on Jesus’ Cross was his way of retaliating against the Jews. Pilate was angry with the Jewish leaders for the way they shouted him down as he tried to release Jesus three times. Therefore he did not back down when they protested the wording of the title. The title itself was helpful 300 years later when Helena, the mother of Constantine went to Jerusalem to search for the Cross.

“In putting a title on Jesus’ Cross, Pilate was at the same time retaliating against the Jews, and making a defense for Christ. Since, they had given Him up as worthless, and attempted to confirm this sentence by making Him share the punishment of the robbers, Pilate thus placed those letters, which utter a clear voice, and show forth His Victory, and proclaim His Kingdom, though not in its completeness. This he made clear not in a single tongue, but in three languages. Since it was likely that there would be a mixed multitude among the Jews on account of the Feast, in order that none might be ignorant of the defense, he publicly recorded the madness of the Jews, in all the (major) languages. They bore malice against Him even when crucified. If He was a mortal and weak, and was about to become extinct, why did they fear the letters asserting that He is the King of the Jews? And what do they ask? ‘Say that ‘he said’. For now it is an assertion, and a general sentence; but if ‘he said’ is added, the charge is shown to be one arising from his own rashness and arrogance. Still Pilate was not turned aside, but stood by his first decision.”

“The wood of the cross was buried after the Crucifixion, because no one was careful to take it up, inasmuch as fear was pressing, and the believers were

¹²⁷ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 134.

¹²⁸ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 309.

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

hurrying to other urgent matters. Since it was later sought for¹³⁰, and it was likely that the three crosses would lie together, in order that the Lord's Cross might not be unknown, it was made clear to all, first by its lying in the middle, and then by the title. For those of the thieves had no titles."

Pilate was also determined that the Jewish leaders would not shout him down again. Josephus records¹³¹ how Pilate got even with them a few years later. Anticipating another riot, He placed soldiers in disguise among the crowd armed with clubs as a riot control measure. When the people began to shout him down, the soldiers, on a signal from Pilate began beating them on the head. Many people died during the resulting melee.

"Pilate stirred up another tumult by making use of the holy treasure, which is called Corban (Mark 7:9-13), in the construction of an aqueduct three hundred stadia¹³² in length. The multitude was greatly displeased at it, and when Pilate was in Jerusalem they surrounded his tribunal and gave utterance to loud complaints. But he, anticipating the tumult, had distributed through the crowd armed soldiers disguised in citizen's clothing, forbidding them to use the sword, but commanding them to strike with clubs those who should make an outcry¹³³. To them he now gave the prearranged signal from the tribunal. Many Jews were beaten and many of them perished in consequence of the blows; while many others were trampled under foot by their own countrymen in their flight, and thus lost their lives. But the multitude, overawed by the fate of those who were slain, held their peace".

The Jeering of Christ on the Cross: Mark 15:29-32, Matthew 27:39-43, Luke 23:34-37

"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You Who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross'. Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let God deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:39-43)

Theophylact stated¹³⁴ that the mocking was the devils' way of making all Christ's miracles look as if they were mere fantasy. The tempting to come down from the Cross was

¹³⁰ Helena, the mother of Constantine, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to search for the Cross in 326 AD, or about 20 years before Chrysostom was born. An old Jew named Judah told her that the Cross was buried under the Temple of Venus that Hadrian (76-138 AD) had built on Golgotha. Helena ordered that the Temple of Venus be torn down and the ground under it excavated. Having done that, they found three crosses. They suspected which cross was the real one: first from its lying in the middle (John 19:18), and second from the title written by Pilate (John 19:19). To dispel all uncertainty as to which, if any, was the real one, they used the Cross to raise a dead man. The Temple of Venus on Golgotha had the effect of preserving the wood of the Cross for 300 years.

¹³¹ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, II, ix, 4.

¹³² That is, 34 miles long. This may be the ancient aqueduct that was found to the South of Jerusalem. Pilate may have simply restored an aqueduct that was built at the time of Solomon. This work was done in the years 30-37 AD

¹³³ That is, make outcry like they did when they demanded that Pilate crucify Christ (Matthew 27:21-24).

¹³⁴ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 135.

similar to the tempting after the forty-day fast at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11).

“Even ‘they that passed by’ on the road blasphemed the Lord, mocking Him as a deceiver. Likewise the chief priests said, ‘Cannot He, Who saved others, save Himself?’ Thus they scoffed at His miracles as if they had all been mere fantasy. For the Lord did save many by working miracles. It is the devil who incited them to say, ‘Come down from the Cross’. The prince of evil knew that salvation would come through the Cross; he was again tempting and testing the Lord. If He did come down from the Cross, the devil could be assured that Jesus was not the Son of God; and for this very reason He did not come down. Christ would not have ascended the Cross in the first place, if He intended to descend from it. But knowing that it was in this manner that salvation would come to mankind, He endured to be crucified and to suffer all the other things”.

Theophylact continued¹³⁵: “The devil said the same thing to Jesus that he said to Him when he tempted Him on the pinnacle¹³⁶ of the Temple (Matthew 4:5-6). Reluctantly conceding any good that he now feared might come through the Cross, the devil wanted to prevent it by any possible means. But all his devices turned back on himself”.

John Chrysostom addressed¹³⁷ the mocking of Christ on the Cross, as part of Satan's agenda for several reasons. First, Pilate's “Accusation” called Jesus a king; they had to disprove that. Second, they feared His Resurrection and wanted to dishonor Him so that people would not follow Him after He rose. Third, their logic was faulty! If the proof that He was the Son of God is His coming down from the Cross, then the proof that the prophets were prophets is their being rescued from their dangers.

“And yet who would not have been moved by the multitude that was following Him, and lamenting Him? Not these wild beasts! Wherefore He gave to the multitude an answer, but not to these men. After having done what they would, they endeavored also to injure His honor, fearing His resurrection. Therefore they said these things publicly, and crucified thieves with Him. Wishing to prove Him a deceiver, they said, ‘You that would destroy the temple, and build it in three days, come down from the cross’ (Matthew 27:40). Since Pilate would not remove the accusation (this was the writing, ‘The king of the Jews’), but he persevered in saying, ‘What I have written, I have written’ (John 19:22), they then endeavored by their derision of Him to show that He is not a king. Wherefore they said ‘If He is the king of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross. He saved others, Himself He cannot save’ (Matthew 27:42), aiming hereby to bring discredit even on His former miracles. And again, ‘If He is the Son of God, and God will have Him, let Him save Him’” (Matthew 27:43).

“O most execrable! Were the prophets not prophets, nor the righteous men righteous, because God did not rescue them out of their dangers. Surely they were, even though they suffered these things. What then could be equal to this stupidity? If the coming of the dangers did not injure the honor of the prophets in

¹³⁵ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 309.

¹³⁶ The pinnacle of the Temple was the flat roof of the Temple structure, about six stories high, and included a railing to guard against accidental falls.

¹³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVII, 2.

Israel, how much more in the case of this man! The thief, who was depraved in such great wickedness, and who had spent his whole life in murders and house-breaking, when these things were being said, he then confessed Him, and made mention of a kingdom. Yet the things that were done seemed to testify the contrary in the eyes of those who did not know the mysterious dispensation, that He was weak and of no power. Nevertheless truth prevailed even by the contrary things”.

Leo the Great stated¹³⁸ that the Chief Priests showed utter ignorance of the Scriptures as they taunted Jesus on the Cross. The prophets predicted everything that would happen, but they never said that Christ would come down from the Cross. Instead, they said the He reigned on the Tree.

“The mysteries of the Law, the sacred observances of the Passover, the mouths of the Prophets never told you that Christ should either not allow Himself to be crucified, or should shake Himself free from the binding nails. What you did find truly and oft-times written is that which applies to your abominable wicked doing and to the Lord’s voluntary suffering. He Himself says by Isaiah, ‘I gave My back to the scourges, My cheeks to the palms of the hand; I turned not My face from the shame of spitting’ (Isaiah 50:6). He Himself says by David, ‘They gave Me gall for My food, and in My thirst they supplied Me with vinegar’ (Psalm 69:21); and again, ‘Many dogs came about Me; the council of evil-doers beset Me. They pierced My hands and My feet, they counted all My bones. But they themselves watched and gazed on Me; they parted My garments among them, and for My robe they cast lots’ (Psalm 22:16-18). Lest the course of your own evil doings should seem to have been foretold, and no power in the Crucified predicted, you read not that the Lord descended from the cross, but you did read, ‘The Lord reigned¹³⁹ on the tree’ (Psalm 96:10).

The Effects of the Crucifixion

Paul described the effect of the Crucifixion in his letter to the Colossians:

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:13-15).

The effect of the Crucifixion was also illustrated after the Exodus when the Lord told Moses to make a bronze replica of the snake that killed many Israelis and set it on a flagstaff (Numbers 21:7-9) or cross. When the people repented, anyone who looked to the bronze snake¹⁴⁰ lived.

¹³⁸ Leo the Great, Sermons, LV, 2.

¹³⁹ Some ancient manuscripts had the words “from the tree” in the text. The texts used by Justin Martyr and Leo the Great had “from the tree” added, but the texts we have today do not have that addition.

¹⁴⁰ This bronze snake was very highly revered in later years, even to the point of cultic worship until reform-minded Hezekiah destroyed it 700 years later (2 Kings 18:1-4).

Since the Altar of Burnt Offering was also made of bronze (overlying wood), bronze has generally been regarded to speak of judgment. Paul spoke about how Christ, who knew no sin, was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6). This is why Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Thus Jesus became the snake on the pole. And in doing so, the handwriting against us in ordinances, which was contrary to us, has been taken out of the way and nailed to the Cross (Colossians 2:13-14). The term “handwriting in ordinances” was a legal term referring to a debt that had to be paid because of money deposited with, or lent to, a person by another, to be returned at an appointed time. An example of this type of debt is the slave who owed his master 10,000 talents of silver¹⁴¹ (Matthew 18:23-35).

John Chrysostom spoke¹⁴² at length of the effects of the Crucifixion and compared it to man’s relationship to God under the Mosaic Law and in the Garden of Eden. Our relationship is not that of slave and Master, but friend with Friend. We are not just made in His Image, but we become sons of God. This begins as we are “baptized into His death” (Romans 6:3). He then outlines what our baptism accomplishes. Chrysostom noted that there was a purpose for Christ’s death in a very public manner, with His enemies as witnesses, so that no one could dispute that He died. Conversely, His Resurrection was not public, since future events would bear witness to the truth. In accomplishing this, Christ “trampled down death by death”. When the dead arose, death met his death-stroke from a dead body.

“Christ has forgiven us all our trespasses, those which produced that deadness. He did not allow them to remain merely scratched out, but wiped them out. What does it mean when He said handwriting in ordinances? This is the Faith. It is enough to believe. He has not set works against works, but works against faith. Blotting out is an advance upon remission, where He did not preserve it, but tore it up, ‘by nailing it to His Cross’. Then to add to this, He ‘disarmed the principalities and powers, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it’ (Colossians 2:13-15). Nowhere has he spoken in so lofty a strain.

Do you see how great His earnestness that the bond should be done away was? We all were under sin and punishment. He Himself, through suffering punishment, did away with both the sin and the punishment, and He was punished on the Cross. To the Cross, then, He affixed it. As having power, He tore it up. By the ‘handwriting’ He could mean three things:

1. That which they said to Moses, namely, ‘Everything that God has said will we do, and be obedient’ (Exodus 24:3).
2. That we owe to God obedience
3. That the devil held possession of it, the handwriting which God made for Adam, saying, ‘In the day you eat of the tree, you shall die’”.

“This handwriting then the devil held in his possession. And Christ did not give it to us, but Himself tore it in two, the action of one who remits joyfully. When He said He ‘disarmed the principalities and powers’, He means the diabolical powers; because they had, as it were, a hold on man. When He became Man broke¹⁴³ that hold”.

¹⁴¹ 10,000 talents of silver represents almost 400 Tons of silver.

¹⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, VI, vv. 13-15.

¹⁴³ That is, the devil now didn’t have a hold on all men.

“What is the meaning of ‘He made a public spectacle of them’ (Colossians 2:15)? Never was the devil in so shameful a plight and well Paul said so. While expecting to have Christ’s humanity in his grasp in Hades, he lost even those he had. When that Body was nailed to the Cross, the dead arose. There, death received his wound, having met his death-stroke from a dead body. As an athlete, when he thinks he has hit his adversary, himself is caught in a fatal grasp; so truly does Christ also show, that to die with confidence is the devil’s shame”.

“The devil would have done everything to persuade men that Christ did not die¹⁴⁴, had he had the power. For His Resurrection was proof demonstrative for all succeeding time. Proof of His death could be obtained at no other time except when it happened. Therefore He died publicly in the sight of all men, but He did not rise publicly, knowing that the future would bear witness to the truth. While the world was looking on, Christ intended that the serpent should be slain high up on the Cross; but here is the marvel. What did the devil do that Christ might die in secret? Listen to Pilate say, ‘Take Him away, and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him’ (John 19:6), and withstanding them in a thousand ways. Again the Jews said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross’ (Matthew 27:40). Then further, when He had received a mortal wound¹⁴⁵, and He did not come down, for this reason He was also committed to burial. It was in His power to have risen immediately, but He did not, that the fact that He died might be believed. In cases of private death, it is possible to impute death to a swoon; but here, it is not possible to do this. Even the soldiers did not break His legs, like those of the others, that it might be made clear that He was dead. Those who buried the Body are known; and therefore the Jews themselves sealed the stone along with the soldiers. What was most of all attended to, was this very thing that it should not be obscure. The witnesses to it are from enemies, from the Jews. Listen to them saying to Pilate, ‘That deceiver said, while he was yet alive, ‘After three days I rise again’. Command therefore that the sepulcher’ (Matthew 26:63, 64) be guarded by the soldiers. This was accordingly done; they also sealed it. They even said afterwards to the Apostles, ‘You intend to bring this Man’s blood upon us’ (Acts 5:28)! He did not allow the fashion of His Cross to be put to shame. Since the Angels have suffered nothing like it, He therefore does everything for this, showing that His death achieved a mighty work. There was, as it were, a single combat. Death wounded Christ; but Christ, being wounded afterwards killed death. A mortal body destroyed him that seemed to be immortal; and the whole world looked on. What is truly wonderful is that He didn’t commit this thing to another. But there was made a second handwriting of another kind than the former”.

“That is, beware then lest this condemn us; after saying, ‘I renounce Satan¹⁴⁶, and array myself with You, O Christ’. This is not the same as the ‘handwriting’, but is rather a covenant. With the ‘handwriting’, one is held accountable for debts. But this covenant has no penalty, ‘If this be done or if this be not done’. What Moses said when he sprinkled the blood of the covenant, by

¹⁴⁴ This is what Simon Magus the heretic taught: that Christ did not die on the Cross. Simon said that it was he, Simon, who only appeared to die on the Cross. For more details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

¹⁴⁵ That is, from the spear, John 19:34

¹⁴⁶ That is, as part of the Baptismal Services.

this God also promised everlasting life. There, it was slave with master, here it is friend with friend: there, it is said, ‘In the day that you eat thereof you shall die’ (Genesis 2:17); an immediate threatening. But here is nothing of the kind! God arrives, i.e. for baptism, and here is nakedness, and there was nakedness in the Garden. There, however, one that had sinned was made naked, because he sinned, but here, one is made naked¹⁴⁷, that he may be set free. Then, man put off the glory which he had; now, he puts off the old man; and before going up (to the contest), puts him off as easily, as it were his garments. He is anointed, as wrestlers about to enter the lists. He is born at once; and as that first man was, not little by little, but immediately. He is anointed (i.e. Chrismation), not as the priests of old time, on the head alone, but rather in more abundant measure. The priests were anointed on the head, the right ear, the hand (Leviticus 8:23, 24), to excite him to obedience, and to good works; but the newly baptized are anointed all over. We notice the similarity to Old Testament priests! He comes not to be instructed merely; but to wrestle, and to be exercised; he is advanced to another creation. When one confesses his belief in the life everlasting, he has confessed a second creation. He took dust from the earth, and formed man (Genesis 2:7); but now, dust no longer, but the Holy Spirit; with This he is formed, with this harmonized, even as Himself was in the womb of the Virgin. He said not in Paradise, but ‘in Heaven’. Do not understand that, because the subject is earth, it is done on earth. He is removed to Heaven, there these things are transacted, in the midst of Angels. God takes up your soul above, above He harmonizes it anew, He places you near to the Kingly Throne. He is formed in the water; he receives spirit instead of a soul. After he is formed, i.e. in baptism, He brings to him, not beasts, but demons, and their prince, and says, ‘Tread on serpents and scorpions’ (Luke 10:19). He said not, ‘Let Us make man in our image, and after our likeness’ (Genesis 1:26), but ‘He gives them to become the sons of God. But of God, he said, ‘they were born’ (John 1:12, 13). That you give no ear to the serpent, immediately he teaches you to say, ‘I renounce you’, that is, ‘whatsoever you say, I will not listen to you’. In order that the serpent not destroy you by means of others, it is said, ‘and your pomp, and your service, and your angels’. He has set him no more to keep Paradise, but to have his citizenship in heaven”.

Tertullian stated¹⁴⁸ that (at least some of) the imagery of the winepress in the Scriptures refers to Christ’s Passion, where He came with His clothes stained red¹⁴⁹. His “clothes” refers to His human nature, which veils the Godhead. The imagery continues at the Lord’s Table, where wine is consecrated as His blood.

“In order that you may discover how anciently wine is used as a figure for blood, turn to Isaiah, who asks, ‘Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah with garments dyed in red, so glorious in His apparel, in the greatness of his might? Why are your garments red, and your raiment as His, Who comes from the treading of the full winepress?’ (Isaiah 63:1-3 LXX) The prophetic Spirit contemplates the Lord as if He were already on His way to His passion, clad in His fleshly nature. As He was to suffer in His human nature, He represents the bleeding condition of His flesh under the metaphor of garments dyed in red, as if

¹⁴⁷ A reference to a person’s baptism.

¹⁴⁸ Tertullian, The Five Books Against Marcion, II, iv, 40.

¹⁴⁹ Because of the violent scourging, Christ also came to the Cross, with His clothes stained red.

reddened in the treading and crushing process of the winepress, from which the laborers descend reddened with the wine juice, like men stained in blood. Much more clearly still does the book of Genesis foretell this, when (in the blessing of Judah, out of whose tribe Christ was to come according to the flesh) it even then delineated Christ in the person of that patriarch. 'He washed His garments in wine, and His clothes in the blood of grapes' (Genesis 49:11); in His garments and clothes the prophecy pointed out his flesh, and His blood in the wine. Thus did He now consecrate His blood in wine, who then (by the patriarch) used the figure of wine to describe His blood". This figure of wine as His blood continues into the Eucharist.

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹⁵⁰ that though Christ came to save everyone, the vine (Israel) that He had planted brought forth thorns and gall, like Sodom, instead of grapes and wine. The prophets had described how this would happen in amazing detail. As a result, the prophetic office was withdrawn from Israel and established in the Church. From the time of the Crucifixion on, there were no more prophets in Israel outside the Church.

"But He endured these things, having come for the salvation of all, yet the people returned Him an evil recompense. Jesus said on the Cross, 'I thirst' (John 19:28). He had brought forth the waters for them out of the rock (Exodus 17:1-7); and He asked fruit of the Vine which He had planted. But what does the Vine do? This Vine was by nature of the holy fathers (i.e. the patriarchs), but of Sodom by purpose of heart. 'For their Vine is of Sodom and their tendrils of Gomorrah' (Deuteronomy 32:32). This Vine, when the Lord was thirsty, having filled a sponge and put it on a reed, offers vinegar to Christ in shock on the Cross. 'They gave Me gall for My food, and in My thirst, they gave Me vinegar to drink' (Psalm 69:21). Do you see the clearness of the Prophets' description? But what sort of gall did they put in My mouth? They gave Him, it says, wine mingled with myrrh (Mark 15:23). Now myrrh is in taste like gall, and very bitter. Are these the things that you recompense to the Lord? Are these your offerings, O Vine, to your Master? Rightly did the Prophet Isaiah bewail you, saying, 'My well beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place. And I waited, he says, that it should bring forth grapes; I thirsted that it should give wine. But it brought forth thorns (Isaiah 5:1-2 LXX); for you see the crown, wherewith I am adorned. What then shall I now decree? I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it (Isaiah 5:6). The clouds which are the Prophets were removed from them, and are for the future in the Church. As Paul says, 'Let the Prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge' (1 Corinthians 14:29); and again, 'God gave in the Church, some Apostles and some Prophets'" (Ephesians 4:11). Some examples of prophets in the Church are Agabus, who bound his own feet and hands (Acts 21:10-11), Silas and Judas Barsabas (Acts 15:32, 22), who was Christ's stepbrother.

Good Friday Third Hour Epistle: Romans 5:6-10 "Justification and Faith"

In Romans, we encounter the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation: *Justification by Faith*. The word "justified" is a translation of both the Hebrew "*tsadaq*" and the Greek

¹⁵⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIII, 29.

“*dikaioo*” and means to render just, innocent or right. This Old Testament concept of being “justified” is used in various Orthodox services. For example: **(Psalm 51:4)** “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight; so that Thou art justified (*tsadaq*) when Thou dost speak and blameless (i.e. clean) when Thou dost judge”. **(Psalm 143:2)** “And do not enter into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight no man living is justified” (*tsadaq*). Yet a time will come when **(Isaiah 45:25)** “In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified (*tsadaq*).

Background: Defining Faith, Belief, Trust

The term “faith” has come to mean something a little different than it did in the Old Testament and in the First Century. This is reflected in the English translations of the Bible today. Listed below are some of the Greek words translated “faith” and their related words:

GREEK WORD	DEFINITION	STRONG’S REF.#
Peitho	To convince, to rely upon	3982
Pistis	from peitho: persuasion, credence	4102
Pistos	from peitho: trustworthy	4103
Pisteuo	from pistis: to have faith	4100
Pistikos	from pistis: genuine, trustworthy	4101
Pistoo	from pistos: to assure	4104

These words are translated into English at various places, *to have faith, to believe, to trust*. But the root word of them all is “*peitho*” which implies faith, belief and trust based upon being convinced. For example, even the demons have faith – and tremble (James 2:19). They have been thoroughly convinced long ago.

If one were to flip through English language Bibles, one would find that the English word faith is used much more often in the New Testament than trust. In the Old Testament, however, the opposite is true. Listed below are some of the Hebrew words that are commonly translated faith, belief, trust:

HEBREW WORD	DEFINITION	STRONG’S REF.#
Aman	to build up, support, trust	539
Emuwn	from aman: established, trusty	529
Emunah	from emuwn: firmness, security	530
Chacah	to flee suddenly for protection	2620
Machaceh	from chacah: a shelter	4268
Batach	to hurry for refuge	982
Mibtach	from batach: a refuge, security, assurance	4009

The first three of the above Hebrew words are commonly translated “to believe” and “to have faith;” the last four are translated “to trust.”

Thus, going back to the original meanings of the words in both New and Old Testaments, the concepts of “faith,” “belief” and “trust” are interwoven and have their root meaning in trust and security based upon something convincing or established. In the Old Testament, the concept of trust goes further and includes words related to shelter, protection and refuge.

A Covenant of Trust

In both Old and New Testament times, the people of God have had a covenant relationship with their Lord. For example, the Lord said, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own special treasure among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5). Following this, the Lord went on to detail the Ten Commandments which can be summarized as “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

A similar covenant exists in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:8-13) and the same basic commandments apply: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). The difference now is that the Mediator of the covenant has come and died (Hebrews 9:15), meaning we are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9), and He has sent us the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; Romans 5:5). The cup of the Lord’s Supper is called “The New Covenant in My Blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25, Luke 22:20). He has also put His Laws into our minds and He has written them on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). Because of this covenant relationship, trust, shelter, protection and refuge exists – and the Lord illustrated this with His analogy to the birds and the flowers (Matthew 6:25-34).

This covenant relationship is so strong that tribulation just generates additional strength. “Tribulation (in the sense of pressure) works cheerful endurance; cheerful endurance works proof and proof works a confident expectation or hope” (Romans 5:3 literal). Faith has its root in being convinced and implies trust. It is tribulation (i.e. the pressure of daily life) that generates the proof and the convincing that the Lord is good and that He can be trusted. This is why we glory in our tribulations (Romans 5:3), because it deepens our trust and increases our faith.

Therefore, faith, belief, trust becomes a real world, tangible experience. And justification by faith becomes a covenant relationship and not just a theological abstraction. The faith of the Centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) serves as a good example of this faith, belief, trust.

How We are “Justified”

To put the faith, belief, trust that Paul is speaking of in context; the phrase “justified by faith” (Romans 5:1) comes as a summary of what Paul has just said in the previous chapter. He described “faith” as follows:

- Belief (or faith) is accounted for righteousness. “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Romans 5:3, 5).
- Works (or earning one’s way) generates further debt, not grace (Romans 5:4).
- Paul quotes David as describing “the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works” (Romans 5:6-8, Psalm 32:1-2).
- This blessedness came to Abraham before his circumcision: therefore it applies to both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 5:9-12).
- The promises made to Abraham also apply to those who are of the faith of Abraham (Romans 5:13-16).

How this fits together, John Chrysostom described¹⁵¹ as having two parts: His part and our part. His part is quite extensive; for our part, however, we bring only faith. Chrysostom illustrated this with an example.

“Consider how Paul everywhere sets down these two points: His part and our part. On His part, however, there are things varied, numerous and diverse. He died for us, further reconciled us, brought us to Himself, and gave us grace unspeakable. But we brought faith only as our contribution. So he says ‘through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand’ (Romans 5:2). This grace is the being counted worthy of the knowledge of God, the being forced from error, the coming to a knowledge of the Truth, the obtaining of all the blessings that come through Baptism. The goal of His bringing us near was that we might receive these gifts. It was not only that we might have simple remission of sins, that we were reconciled; but that we might receive also countless benefits”.

“Consider an example: A person has acquired rule, glory and authority, yet he does not hold it continuously, but is quickly cast out. Or if a man does not take it from him, death comes and is sure to take it from him. But God’s gifts are not of this kind; for neither man, nor occasion, nor crisis of affairs, nor even the devil, not even death can come and cast us out. But when we are dead, we then have possession of them, and keep going on enjoying more and more. If you feel doubt about those things to come, considering those now present and what you have already received, believe in the other also. This is why Paul says ‘And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God’ (Romans 5:2) that you may learn what kind of soul the faithful ought to have”.

In many places affected by the Protestant Reformation, “faith” and “works” were often viewed as separate and exclusive. In Orthodox tradition “faith” and “works” are seen as two sides of the same coin.

We Are Crucified With Christ

Peter’s conduct in Antioch is an illustration of Justification by Faith. When Peter was in Antioch during the years following his escape from Herod (Acts 12:1-17), he usually ate with the Antioch Gentiles. But when Jews came down from Jerusalem, Peter withdrew and ate separately with them (Galatians 2:11-13). Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, referred to Peter, Barnabas and others of the Jews as hypocrites and as not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel regarding Jewish dietary laws (Leviticus 11).

Paul’s argument was that Peter, himself, had a vision (Acts 10:10-16) which Peter rested heavily upon in his argument with the Jews at the Council of Jerusalem that the Gentiles are equal partakers of the Kingdom of God (Acts 11:15-18). Peter testified of this, “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them (the Gentiles) by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinctions between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke (i.e. the Mosaic Law) on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:8-11).

¹⁵¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, IX, Verse 2.

The decree of the Council of Jerusalem was that the Gentile believers did not need to keep the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:19-29).

There was a strong heretic group within the Early Church, sometimes referred to as the Ebionites¹⁵² that advocated a strict keeping of all aspects of the Mosaic Law. Paul wrote to the Galatians about this, and referred to Peter's conduct in Antioch as an example of the truth of the Gospel, that a man is justified by the faith of Jesus Christ and not by the works of the Law (Galatians 2:16). Paul spoke of us as being co-crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), alluding to Baptism.

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁵³ that the Law itself teaches us to follow Christ, not the written letter. The entire history of the Faith is wrapped around this in addressing justification. If we hold to the latter rather than the Master's voice, we testify that Christ died in vain.

“The Law itself has taught me no longer to obey itself; and therefore if I do so, I shall be transgressing even its teaching. Moses says, speaking of Christ, ‘The Lord God will raise up to you a Prophet from the midst of you of your brethren, like me; to Him shall you listen’ (Deuteronomy 18:15). Therefore those who do not obey Him transgress the Law”.

Referring to Paul's argument regarding Peter in Antioch, Chrysostom continued, “Christ's death is a plain proof of the inability of the Law to justify us; and if the Law does justify, then His death is superfluous. Yet how could it be reasonable to say (Christ's death) has been done heedlessly and in vain when it is so awesome, so surpassing human reason, a mystery so ineffable. Patriarchs travailed with this, Prophets foretold it, and angels gazed on with consternation and all men confess this as the summit of Divine tenderness. How utterly out of place it would be if they should say that so great and high a deed had been done superfluously, for this is what their conduct (i.e. the conduct of Peter and the Jews in Antioch) came to”.

Paul stated that “those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24-25). Since the passions and desires of the flesh are the things that hinder us from a close walk with God, denying these is an integral part of our crosses. And our crosses will generally lead us to a point where we are better able to do this.

But we need to actually do something about it. “If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). This is a faith-works issue. In James 2:17-20, the English words to believe and to have faith are translations of the same Greek word (meaning to believe, to have faith, to trust). Similarly “works” means labor or deeds. Demons believe and have faith (James 2:19), but they tremble at the One they “believe in” and they have no deeds to show for their belief or faith. Similarly for us; if we live in the spirit, but don't walk in the Spirit, our belief or faith is barren or dead, just like that of the demons.

As an example, consider the Crosses of the Apostle Paul. “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was shipwrecked; a

¹⁵² For more details of the Ebionites and other 1st Century heretics, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, Unpublished Work, 2002.

¹⁵³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Chapter 2.

night and a day I have been in the deep (i.e. after shipwreck). I have been in journeys often, in perils of waters, of robbers, in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness. Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). Yet all this did not cause Paul any permanent harm. All this caused Paul to be one of the most admired of all the Apostles.

Similarly with the Patriarch Job’s Crosses. In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness (Job 1:8). Yet the Lord allowed Satan to take away all his wealth, his ten children, plus his health, leaving him sitting among the ashes scraping the pus off his skin boils with a piece of broken pottery (Job 1:13-22, 2:7-8). To add insult to injury, Job’s friends then began to inquire of him which of his secret sins had brought this calamity on him (Job 4:7-21, 8:1-6, 11:1-20). Job grew spiritually because of all the evil that he had to bear and he was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11). Obviously Job’s Crosses did him no permanent harm either.

Taking Up Our Cross

If we are truly justified, we will see the Cross in our lives. The Lord said, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

The Cross is the ultimate act of the love of God for man. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). The Lord applies these same principles that He used for Himself to us: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

From the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke to the multitudes: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (Matthew 5:44-48). This is how the Lord treated His enemies; He took even their sins with Him to the Cross.

Contrasting life in the world around them, Jesus had said, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your deacon and the slave of all” (Mark 10:42-44). The Apostle Peter elaborated on this and compared the humility of Christ with how husbands and wives should treat one another with love, humility and obedience (1 Peter 2:21-3:9). Diadochos of Photiki, in commenting on this, said¹⁵⁴,

“Obedience is the chief among the initiatory virtues; for first it displaces presumption and then it engenders humility within us. Thus it becomes, for those who are willing to embrace it, a door leading to the love of God”.

The Lord’s brother, James, wrote, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up” (James 4:10). Diadochos also commented¹⁵⁵ on this as follows,

“When the intellect fully and consciously senses the illumination of God’s Grace, the soul possesses a humility which is, as it were, natural. Wholly filled with divine blessedness, it can no longer be puffed up with its own glory; for even

¹⁵⁴ Diadochos of Photiki, 5th Century, On Spiritual Knowledge, Text 41.

¹⁵⁵ Diadochos of Photiki, On Spiritual Knowledge, Text 95.

if it carries out God's commandments ceaselessly, it still considers itself more humble than all other souls because it shares His forbearance". John of Karpathos added¹⁵⁶, "If you always behave with humility before the Lord, you will never show arrogance toward anyone".

Gregory of Nyssa stated¹⁵⁷ that humility cannot be achieved easily. We must imitate the Master Who put His divinity aside to take on the filth of humanity.

"But let no one imagine that humility can be achieved easily and without labor. The Lord removes pride, the root of evil, from our character by counseling us to imitate Him who became poor of His own will, Who is the truly Blessed One. For as it is said, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant' (Philippians 2:5-7). The perfectly Pure accepts the filth of human nature".

Just as our Lord was exalted and glorified because He humbled Himself to the point of death on His Cross (Philippians 2:5-10), so also we will be exalted if we humble ourselves in taking up our crosses. Our crosses are not our enemies; our crosses are for our benefit. Referring to the reply of the Twelve to Jesus, "Behold we have left all we had and followed You; what therefore shall we have?" (Matthew 19:27, Mark 10:28, Luke 18:28). Gregory of Nyssa said¹⁵⁸,

"Would you like to know who it is that is poor in spirit? He is poor in spirit who is given the riches of the soul in exchange for material wealth; he who is poor for the sake of the spirit. He has shaken off earthly riches like a burden so that he might be lightly lifted into the air and be borne upwards".

Paul spoke of Jesus enduring His Cross and despising the shame because of the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). That joy for Him was us and our faithfully enduring our crosses. And like Him, any humiliation we suffer in the eyes of the world causes us no permanent harm and does not even compare to the rewards the Lord brings at His Second Coming.

¹⁵⁶ John of Karpathos, 7th Century, Texts for the Monks of India, Text 12.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, 4th Century, The Beatitudes, Sermon 1.

¹⁵⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, The Beatitudes, Sermon 1.

Good Friday Sixth Hour Prayers

The Two Thieves

The Darkness

Good Friday Sixth Hour Gospel: Luke 23:32-49 "The Two Thieves"
8th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: Luke 23:32-49 "The Two Thieves"

In examining the two thieves on the Cross, we discover some true insights into the Grace of God. We also see the Church Fathers' concept of Paradise as the abode of the Just pending the Second Coming, where they distinguish between Paradise and the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the full inheritance of the saints. It was to this Paradise that Paul was caught up (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

From Luke's account of the two thieves, "There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left".

"And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God'. The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself'. And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then one of the criminals, who were hanged, blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us'. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong'. Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom'. And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:32-43).

Matthew and Mark state that the robbers both reviled Jesus at first (Matthew 27:44, Mark 15:32). However the one had more insight than the other did into the things that were happening, and subsequently repented of his words.

Jesus was the first of the three to die, about the ninth hour, or 3 PM. This means that the repentant thief, before he died, was able to see all the miraculous things¹⁵⁹ that happened following the death of Christ. He saw the darkness that began at the sixth hour and which lasted until the ninth hour, and this may have tipped him off that this was Someone Special hanging next to him. He saw the earthquake and the splitting of the rocks after Christ's death, and he heard the centurion saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:51-54)

Following the ninth hour, "Because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs" (John 19:31-33).

¹⁵⁹ For details of this, see the Study for Good Friday Ninth Hour Prayers.

According to Church tradition¹⁶⁰, the name of the repentant thief was Dismas or Dysmas and the other was named Gestas¹⁶¹. In some accounts, there had been some contact between Jesus and the two thieves during the Flight into Egypt c. 32 years earlier. In this account¹⁶², Joseph and Mary endeavored to cross a desert region by night after hearing that it was infested with robbers. As they went along, the two thieves were standing guard for their comrades, and stopped Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Dismas (called Titus in this account), bribed his fellow thief with 40 drachmas and a belt to let the Holy Family proceed without waking the rest of the thieves. Mary, seeing that the robber had done them a kindness, said to him, “The Lord God will sustain you by His Right Hand, and will grant you remission of your sins”.

Cyril of Jerusalem commented¹⁶³ on the unique situation that the repentant thief found himself in. The lights went on as he was hanging on the cross, after over 32 years of crime, and he recognized Him who would come in His Kingdom. At the place where Adam fell by the tree, the Tree of the Cross brought the thief back to Paradise. The thief had a will for righteousness, but death prevented him, and the Lord accepted faith instead.

“To him it was the end of life and the beginning of restoration; the surrender of his soul and a first share in salvation. After rebuking the other, he said, ‘Lord, remember me; for with You is my account. Do not listen to this other man, for the eyes of his understanding are blinded; but remember me. I say not, remember my works, for of these I am afraid. Every man has a feeling for his fellow traveler; I am traveling with You towards death. Remember me, Your fellow traveler. I do not say, ‘Remember me now, but, when You come in Your Kingdom’”.

“What power, O robber, led you to the light? Who taught you to worship that despised Man, your companion on the Cross? O Light Eternal, which gives light to them that are in darkness! Therefore also he justly heard the words¹⁶⁴, ‘Be of good cheer’; not that your deeds are worthy of good cheer; but that the King is here, dispensing favors. The request reached to a distant time; but the grace was very speedy. ‘Truly I say unto you, this day shall you be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43); because today you have heard My voice, and have not hardened your heart (Psalm 95:7-8). Very speedily I passed sentence on Adam, very speedily I pardon you’. To him it was said, ‘In the day wherein you eat, you shall surely die’ (Genesis 2:17); but you today have obeyed the Faith, today is your salvation. Adam by the Tree fell away; you by the Tree were brought into Paradise. Do not fear the serpent; he shall not cast you out; for he is fallen from heaven (Luke 10:18). I say not to you, ‘This day shall you depart’, but, ‘This day shall you be with Me’. Be of good courage; you shall not be cast out. Fear not the flaming sword (Genesis 3:24); it shrinks from its Lord. O mighty and ineffable grace! The faithful Abraham had not yet entered, but the robber enters! Moses and the Prophets had not yet entered, and the robber enters, though a breaker of the law. Paul also wondered at this before you, saying, ‘Where sin

¹⁶⁰ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 134.

¹⁶¹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Gospel of Nicodemus”, Part I, The Acts of Pilate, First Greek Form, Chapter 9, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

¹⁶² Roberts and Donaldson, “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Chapter 23, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

¹⁶³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 30-31.

¹⁶⁴ Cyril has added these words to the text of Luke 23:43 as being implied therein.

abounded, there grace did much more abound' (Romans 5:20). They who had borne the heat of the day had not yet entered; and he of the eleventh hour entered. Let none murmur against the good man of the house, for he says, 'Friend, I do you no wrong; is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with My own?' (Matthew 20:12-16) The robber has a will to work righteousness, but death prevents him; I do not wait exclusively for the work, but faith also I accept. I have come who feed My sheep among the lilies (Song of Solomon 6:2-3), I have come to feed them in the gardens. I have found a sheep that was lost, but I lay it on My shoulders (Luke 15:4-5); for he believes, since he himself has said, 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep (Psalm 119:176); Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom'" (Luke 23:42).

Irenaeus wrote¹⁶⁵ that Paradise is the abode of the just until the consummation of all things, and includes those that were translated such as Enoch and Elijah. Adam dwelt in Paradise before the Fall, and Paul was caught up there in a vision. For most people, the Resurrection of the body has not yet occurred, and they live in Paradise with their soul only. For a few, like Elijah, they live there bodily also.

"Our predecessors advanced beyond seven hundred, eight hundred, and nine hundred years of age; and their bodies kept pace with the protracted length of their days, and participated in life as long as God willed that they should live. Enoch, when he pleased God, was translated in the same body in which he pleased Him, thus pointing out by anticipation the translation of the just. Elijah, too, was caught up, when he was yet in the substance of the natural form; thus exhibiting in prophecy the assumption of those who are spiritual, and that nothing stood in the way of their body being translated and caught up. By means of the very same hands through which they were molded at the beginning, did they receive this translation and assumption. The first man was placed in Paradise, as the Scripture declares 'And God planted a garden [Greek LXX: Paradeisos] eastward in Eden, and there He placed the man whom He had formed' (Genesis 2:8). Afterwards when man proved disobedient, he was cast out from there into this world (Genesis 3:22-24). The elders, who were disciples of the apostles, tell us that those who were translated were transferred to that place. Paradise has been prepared for righteous men, such as have the Spirit; in which place Paul the apostle, when he was caught up, heard words which are unspeakable as regards us in our present condition (2 Corinthians 12:4). There shall they who have been translated remain until the consummation of all things, as a prelude to immortality".

Athanasius stated¹⁶⁶ that Adam, who was cast out of Paradise, reentered Paradise by means of the thief.

"All things which the Father rules and sways, the Son rules and sways likewise: wholly from the Whole, being like the Father as the Lord says, 'He that has seen Me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). But he was begotten ineffably and incomprehensibly, for 'Who shall declare his generation?' (Isaiah 53:8); in other words, no one can. At the consummation of the ages (Hebrews 9:26), He descended from the bosom of the Father, and took from the undefiled Virgin

¹⁶⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, v, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, "Statement of Faith", 1, in *Epistula Eusebii*.

Mary our humanity, Christ Jesus, whom He delivered of His own will to suffer for us, as the Lord said, ‘No man takes My life from Me. I have power to lay it down, and have power to take it again’ (John 10:18). In which humanity He was crucified and died for us, rose from the dead, and was taken up into the heavens, having been created as the beginning of ways for us (Proverbs 8:22). When on earth, He showed us light from out of darkness, salvation from error, life from the dead, an entrance to Paradise, from which Adam was cast out, and into which he again entered by means of the thief. As the Lord said, ‘This day shall you be with me in Paradise’ (Luke 23:43), into which Paul also once entered. He showed us also a way up to the heavens, where the humanity of the Lord, in which He will judge the quick and the dead, entered as precursor for us”.

Leo the Great stated¹⁶⁷ that the triumph of the Cross was immediate and effective. This is a mystery as to how so great a benefit could be conferred upon the thief.

The Cross of Christ, therefore, symbolizes the true altar of prophecy, on which the oblation of man’s nature should be celebrated by means of a salvation-bringing Victim. There the blood of the spotless Lamb blotted out the consequences of the ancient trespass. There the whole tyranny of the devil’s hatred was crushed, and humiliation triumphed gloriously over the lifting up of pride. So swift was the effect of faith, that the one robber, who believed in Christ as the Son of God, entered Paradise justified. Who can unfold the mystery of so great a boon? Who can state the power of so wondrous a change? In a moment, the guilt of long evil-doing is done away; clinging to the cross, amid the cruel tortures of his struggling soul, he passes over to Christ. To him, on whom his own wickedness had brought punishment, Christ’s grace now gives a crown.

Ambrose, writing¹⁶⁸ a treatise for the Emperor Gratian against the Arians, pointed out some of the things the Arians omitted, which included the inviting the robber into Paradise.

“Even in the very hour of mockery and insult, acknowledge His Godhead. He hung on the Cross, and all the elements did Him homage. The sun withdrew his rays, the daylight vanished, darkness came down and covered the land, the earth trembled; yet He Who hung there trembled not. What was it that these signs signified, but reverence for the Creator? That He hangs on the Cross, this you regard; that He gives the kingdom of God, this you regard not. That He tasted of death, you read, but that He also invited the robber into Paradise, to this you disregard. You gaze at the women weeping by the tomb, but not upon the angels keeping watch by it. What He said, you read; what He did, you do not read. You say that the Lord said to the Canaanite woman, ‘I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 15:24). You do not say that He did what she asked Him to do”.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁶⁹ that until the thief repented, Jesus had been hearing the mockery from everyone around Him except the Holy Women.

“Those, who before paid Him attention, had deserted Him. But His enemies and foes, having got Him in the midst of themselves on the cross,

¹⁶⁷ Leo the Great, Sermons, LV, iii.

¹⁶⁸ Ambrose, Exposition of the Christian Faith, II, xi, 96.

¹⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVII, 2.

insulted, reviled, mocked, derided, scoffed at Him; Jews and soldiers from below, from above thieves on either side. Both thieves insulted and upbraided Him. How then did Luke say that one ‘rebuked’ the other (Luke 23:40)? Both things were done, for at first both upbraided Him, but afterwards one did so no more. That you might not think the thing had been done by any agreement, or that the thief was not a thief, by his insolence he showed you, that up on the cross he was a thief and an enemy, and at once was changed”.

John Chrysostom also stated¹⁷⁰ that while the devil tried to cast a veil over what was done, everything contributed to the glory of Christ on the Cross.

“The devil therefore wished to cast a veil over what was done, but was unable; for the three were crucified, but Jesus alone was glorious, that you may learn that His power affected all. Yet the miracles took place when the three had been nailed to the cross; but no one attributed anything of what was done to either of those others, but to Jesus only. So entirely was the plot of the devil rendered vain, and all returned upon his head. For even of these two, one was saved. He therefore did not insult the glory of the Cross, but contributed to it not a little. For it was a greater matter than shaking the rocks, to change a thief upon the cross, and to bring him to Paradise”.

Theophylact stated¹⁷¹ that the repentant thief, Dismas, recognized in Jesus’ voice His goodness and His Divinity, when He said on behalf of His crucifiers, ‘Father forgive them’ (Luke 23:34). The thief asked for entry into the Kingdom, and Christ promised him Paradise until the Kingdom was available for all.

“The voice of Jesus was not only full of compassion, but it also revealed great power. He did not say, ‘Lord, I beseech You, forgive them’, but instead spoke the simple and authoritative words, ‘Father, forgive them’. Therefore when the former blasphemer recognized by this voice that Jesus was indeed a king, he rebuked the other thief, and said to Jesus, ‘Remember me when you come in Your Kingdom’. The Lord replied, ‘Today you shall be with Me in Paradise’ (Luke 23:42-43). As a man, He was on the Cross, but as God, He is everywhere, both on the Cross and in Paradise, filling all things (Ephesians 4:10), and nowhere absent”.

“But how can the Lord say this to the thief, when Paul said that none of the saints had received the promise (Hebrews 11:39)? Some say that Paul was referring just to those saints that he had just enumerated. Others say that the thief is not yet in Paradise, but will be there eventually”.

“In understanding this, we must distinguish between the Kingdom of Heaven and Paradise. We pray, ‘Your Kingdom come’ and not ‘May we live in Paradise’. The thief asked the Lord to remember him when He came in His Kingdom; Jesus promised him Paradise. Quoting Isaiah, Paul said of the Kingdom of Heaven, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). Therefore the Lord does not contradict what Paul said about receiving the promises. The repentant thief did obtain Paradise, but he has not yet

¹⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

¹⁷¹ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 310-312.

obtained the Kingdom. But he will obtain the Kingdom, along with all those whom Paul enumerated. In the meantime, he has Paradise, which is a place of spiritual rest”.

“Even if the Kingdom of Heaven and Paradise were the same thing, this does not prevent the Lord’s words and those of Paul from being in agreement. The repentant thief is in Paradise along with those mentioned by Paul, but they do not yet enjoy the full inheritance of good things. Although they do not yet enjoy their reward in full, nevertheless in the meanwhile they pass their time in places of light, of fragrance, of royalty in the tabernacles of the righteous, although they are not yet entitled to the full measure of the gifts of the Kingdom”.

“Just as a victorious king returns in triumph from his conquest, bringing with him the best of the spoils, so too the Lord, having despoiled the devil of the best of the devil’s own plunder, brought it with Him as He returned into man’s ancient homeland, or Paradise. After His death as a man, Christ was present in Paradise as God, but also by reason of His human soul endowed with logos and mind. He was in Paradise with His mind, and simultaneously, He descended into Hades with His soul. By saving the thief, He also bound the devil, the vessel of evil, as the Lord foretold when He said that one must first bind the strong man and only then can he plunder the strong man’s goods” (Matthew 12:29).

Cyril of Alexandria referred¹⁷² to the confession of faith by the repentant thief as beautiful. He was able to see through the façade of contrasts.

“He saw Him crucified, and called Him a King. He Who was bearing scorn and suffering, he expected to come in Godlike glory. He saw Him surrounded by a multitude of the Jews, and the wicked gang of the Pharisees, and Pilate’s band of soldiers. All these were mocking Him, and no single one of them confessed”.

7th Gospel Holy Thursday Evening: Matthew 27:45-54 “Extraordinary Events During the Crucifixion”

“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land¹⁷³. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:45, 50-54)

“So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous Man!’ And the whole crowd, who came together to that sight, seeing what had

¹⁷² Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Homily 153, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 610.

¹⁷³ The Greek word, *Ge*, translated “land”, is a general word that is also translated “earth”, referring to the entire globe. For examples where the context implies “earth” as in the entire globe, see Matthew 24:30, 35; 28:18; Luke 21:25, 35. For examples where the context implies just the nation of Israel, see Matthew 2:21; Luke 21:23.

been done, beat their breasts and returned. But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things” (Luke 23:47-49).

The Darkness

Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two (Luke 23:44-49).

The darkness was not just a local event, but covered the whole earth as well as Palestine. According to tradition¹⁷⁴, Dionysius the Aeropagite, whom Paul converted in Athens on his second missionary journey in c. 50 AD (Acts 17:34), was in Egypt when the sun was darkened. As an unbeliever, he cried out, “Either God, the Creator of the world is suffering, or the world is ending!” Dionysius had been a member of the Greek Supreme Court (the Aeropagus) in Athens before the Apostle Paul converted him. Dionysius later wrote a document called “The Celestial Hierarchy”, which endeavors to define the various angelic or demonic beings of various ranks. The document was likely edited or revised by others later on, and therefore today the author is called “Pseudo-Dionysius”.

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹⁷⁵ that from the Sixth Hour to the Ninth Hour, it was neither day nor night. The prophets had foretold this; but until it happened, one would have difficulty piecing the prophetic accounts together.

“Christ then was crucified for us, who was judged in the night, when it was cold, and therefore a ‘fire of coals’ (John 18:18) was laid. He was crucified at the third hour; ‘and from the sixth hour there was darkness until the ninth hour’ (Matthew 27:45); but from the ninth hour there was light again. Are these things also written? Let us inquire. Now the Prophet Zechariah says, ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that there shall not be light, and there shall be cold and frost¹⁷⁶ one day. And that day shall be known to the Lord, and *it shall not be* day or night; but towards evening it shall be light’ (Zechariah 14:6-7 LXX). What, didn’t He know any other days? Days are many, but this is the day of the Lord’s patience, which the Lord made (Psalm 118:24). What is this dark saying which the Prophet speaks? That day is neither day nor night? What then shall we name it? The Gospel interprets it, by relating the event. It was not day; for the sun shone not uniformly from his rising to his setting, but from the sixth hour till the ninth hour, there was darkness at mid-day. The darkness therefore was interposed; but ‘God called the darkness night’ (Genesis 1:5). It was neither day nor night: for neither was it all light, that it should be called day; nor was it all darkness, that it should be called night; but after the ninth hour the sun shone forth. This also the Prophet foretells; for after saying, ‘Not day, nor night’, he added, ‘And toward evening, it shall be light’. (Zechariah 14:7 LXX). Do you see the exactness of the prophets? Do you see the truth of the things, which were written many years earlier?”

Cyril continued¹⁷⁷ to elaborate on this unusual darkness¹⁷⁷, and mentioned how the prophets had foretold it.

¹⁷⁴ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 3.

¹⁷⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 24.

¹⁷⁶ That is, the cold on account of which Peter warmed himself (Mark 14:54).

¹⁷⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 25-26, 34.

“You might ask at exactly what hour the sun failed? Was it the fifth hour, or the eighth, or the tenth? Tell, O Prophet, the exact time to the Jews, who are unwilling to hear; when shall the sun go down? The Prophet Amos answers, ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, that the sun shall go down at noon (for there was darkness from the sixth hour); and the light shall grow dark over the earth in the day’ (Amos 8:9). What sort of season is this, O Prophet, and what sort of day? ‘And I will turn your feasts into mourning’ (Amos 8:10); for this was done in the days of unleavened bread, and at the feast of the Passover. Then afterwards he says, ‘And I will make Him as the mourning of an Only Son, and those with Him as a day of anguish’ (Amos 8:10). For in the day of unleavened bread, and at the feast, their women were wailing and weeping, and the Apostles had hidden themselves and were in anguish. Wonderful then is this prophecy”.

“But, some one will say, ‘Give me yet another sign; what other exact sign is there of that which has come to pass?’ Jesus was crucified; and He wore but one coat, and one cloak. His cloak the soldiers shared among themselves, having torn it into four; but His coat was not torn, for when torn it would have been no longer of any use. So about this, the soldiers cast lots; the one they divide, but for the other they cast lots. Is then this also written? The diligent chanters of the Church, who imitate the Angel hosts, know this and continually sing praises to God. They are thought worthy to chant Psalms in this Golgotha, and to say, ‘They parted My garments among them, and on My vesture they did cast lots’ (Psalm 22:18; John 19:24)”.

“The Sun was darkened, because of ‘the Sun of Righteousness’ (Malachi 4:2). Rocks were broken, because of the spiritual Rock (Matthew 27:51, 1 Corinthians 10:4). Tombs were opened, and the dead arose, because of Him who was ‘free among the dead’ (Psalm 88:4-5 LXX); He sent forth His prisoners¹⁷⁸ out of the pit wherein is no water’ (Zechariah 9:11 LXX). Be not then ashamed of the Crucified, but be also bold to say, ‘He bears our sins, and endures grief for us, and with His stripes we are healed’ (Isaiah 53:4-5). Let us be thankful to our Benefactor. Again; ‘for the transgression of my people was He led to death; and I will give the wicked for His burial, and the rich for His death’ (Isaiah 53:8-9). Therefore Paul says plainly, ‘that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He has risen again the third day according to the Scriptures’” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

John Chrysostom stated¹⁷⁹ that the darkness covered the entire earth, and was not just an eclipse. This darkness had occurred only once before in Egypt, when the prototype of the Passover occurred (Exodus 10:21-29). In the Passover in Egypt, the thick darkness lasted for three days; at the Crucifixion, it lasted for three hours. This miracle, which Christ performed while He was fastened to the Cross, was greater than what they asked for when they taunted Him about coming down from the Cross.

“It was much more marvelous that these things should be done when He was nailed to the cross, than when He was walking on earth. Not in this respect

¹⁷⁸ This refers to the ransacking of Hades when the Lord descended into Hell (Ephesians 4:8-10). For more details, see the Study for Holy Saturday.

¹⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

only was the wonder, but because that which they had sought¹⁸⁰ was done from heaven, and it was over the entire world. This had never happened before, but in Egypt only, when the Passover was first instituted. Those events were prototypes of these”.

“And observe when it took place. At midday, that all that dwell on the earth may know it, when it was day all over the world; which was enough to convert them, not by the greatness of the miracle only, but also by its taking place in due season. For after all their insulting, and their lawless derision, this is done, when they had let go their anger, when they had ceased mocking, when they were satiated with their jeering, and had spoken all that they were minded. Then He shows the darkness, in order that at least having vented their anger, they may profit by the miracle. This was more marvelous than to come down from the cross, that being on the cross He should work these things. Whether they thought He Himself had done it, they ought to have believed and to have feared. Even if they thought that the Father had done this, they ought to have been moved to compunction, for that darkness was a token of His anger at their crime. That it was not an eclipse, but both wrath and indignation, is clear by the time, for it continued three hours, but an eclipse takes place in one moment of time, and they know it, who have seen this. Eclipses have taken place even in our generation. How, you may say, did not all marvel, and account Him to be God? No one was concerned to inquire into the cause of it, and great was the habit of ungodliness. And they did not know the cause of what took place, and they thought perhaps that this happened due to an eclipse or some natural effect. They knew nothing, neither did they inquire, because of great indifference”.

Theophylact stated¹⁸¹ that the strange darkness and the accompanying events were an answer to the request by the Jewish leaders for a sign.

“The Jews once had asked to see a sign from heaven (Matthew 12:38-40). Behold, now, a sign -- this strange darkness. The Lord showed that He was not crucified because He was too weak to resist; He Who did such things as these had the power to shatter and destroy His crucifiers”.

Cyril of Alexandria linked¹⁸² the darkness to the spiritual blindness of the Jewish leaders, where inanimate creation could see what they could not. Even the Temple mourned for its Master.

“He who excels all created things, and shares the Father's throne, humbled Himself to emptying, and took the form of a slave, and endured the limits of human nature, that He might fulfill the promise made of God to the forefathers of the Jews. But they were so obstinate and disobedient as even to rise up against their Master. They made it their business to deliver the Prince of life to death, and crucified the Lord of glory. When they had affixed to the cross the Lord of all,

¹⁸⁰ That is, the Scribes and Pharisees had asked for a sign. Jesus told them that the only sign they would get would be that of the Prophet Jonah. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster for three days, so He would be in the heart of the earth for three days (Matthew 12:38-40). These events are now part of that sign that they sought for.

¹⁸¹ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 313.

¹⁸² Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 153, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 610-611.

the sun over their heads withdrew, and the light at midday was wrapped in darkness, as the divine Amos had foretold (Amos 5:18-20). For there was darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour; and this was a plain sign to the Jews, that the minds of those who crucified Him were wrapped in spiritual darkness, a blindness in part had happened to Israel (Romans 11:25). And David in his love of God even curses them, saying, ‘Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see’ (Psalm 69:23). Creation itself bewailed its Lord; for the sun was darkened, and the rocks were broken, and the very temple assumed the garb of mourning¹⁸³ for its veil was torn from the top to the bottom. This is what God signified to us by the voice of Isaiah, saying, ‘And I will clothe the heavens with darkness, and wrap it around with sackcloth’” (Isaiah 50:3).

The Earthquake and the Raising of the Dead

The text states that “the earth quaked and the rocks were split” (Matthew 27:51). “The rocks”, in this case, refers to the tombs in that area. It was customary to bury the dead in tombs that were carved out of a hillside, often into solid rock. After a year or so, when the flesh had rotted away from the bodies, the bones of the dead were put into small boxes, called ossuaries, for permanent storage.

When the rocks split, the ancient graves were opened. But the people who had been buried there did not come out of the tombs until after Christ’s Resurrection (Matthew 27:52-53). According to tradition¹⁸⁴, some of those who were raised were the Prophet Daniel and his three co-workers Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, known more commonly to us (Daniel 1:7) by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. All these appeared to many in Jerusalem before dying again (Matthew 27:53). According to other tradition¹⁸⁵, some of those who were raised even testified before the Sanhedrin. For these people to be raised is incredible! All that was left of them was a small pile of bones in a bone box! See Appendix G for the Study for Holy Saturday for more details of this resurrection and the testimony before the Sanhedrin.

Nickolai Velimirovic commented¹⁸⁶ on the physical results of the Lord being lifted up as follows:

“Oh what a terrible rebuke to man! Lifeless nature recognized Him whom we were not able to recognize. The whole of mute creation trembled and stood up in protest in its own way and with its own language. The mute earth quaked -- that is its language. The rocks are broken -- that is their language. The sun withholds its light -- that is its language. The whole of creation protests in its own way, for the whole creation is obedient, as Adam was once in Paradise. The whole creation knows Him, as Adam did in Paradise. How it is that irrational creation knew Him and was obedient to Him, we do not know. It is some sort of inner instinct of creation, which came to it by the Word of God, Who made it. This instinct of creation is of greater worth than human understanding that is darkened by sin. Of all that exists, nothing is blinder than the human

¹⁸³ Tearing one’s clothing was an outward sign of mourning. See for example Genesis 37:34, Job 1:20, Joshua 7:6, 1 Kings 21:27.

¹⁸⁴ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 17.

¹⁸⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Gospel of Nicodemus”, Part II, Christ’s Descent into Hell, First Latin Version, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

¹⁸⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, March 28.

understanding when darkened by sin. It not only does not see that which it was created to see, but sees that which is contrary to being, contrary to God, contrary to truth”.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁸⁷ that in answer to the blasphemy of the crowd, Jesus performed greater miracles than they had asked for.

They had said, ‘He saved others, Himself He cannot save’ (Matthew 27:42). But He, while hanging on the cross, proved this statement was wrong most abundantly on the bodies of His servants. If for Lazarus to rise on the fourth day was a great thing, how much more for all those who had long ago fallen asleep, at once to appear alive, which was a sign of the future resurrection. For, ‘many bodies of the saints which slept, arose and went into the holy city, and appeared to many’ (Matthew 27:52). In order that what was done might not be accounted to be an imagination, they appear to many in the city¹⁸⁸. The Centurion too glorified God, saying, ‘Truly this was a righteous man. The multitudes that came together to that sight, returned beating their breasts’ (Luke 23:48). So great was the power of the crucified, that after so much mocking, scoffs, and jeers, both the centurion was moved to compunction, and the people. Some say that there is also a martyrdom of this centurion¹⁸⁹, who after these things grew to manhood in the faith.

Chrysostom continued¹⁹⁰, “And together with these things He showed Himself also by what followed after these things, by the raising of the dead. For in the instance of Elisha, one on touching a dead body rose again (2 Kings 13:20-21); but now by a voice He raised them, His body continuing up there, on the cross. All is done that this might be believed. They are not merely raised, but also rocks are broken, and the earth shaken, that they might learn, that He was able to strike them blind, and to rend them in pieces. He that cleft rocks asunder, and darkened the world, much more could have done these things to them, had it been His will. But He did not want to; but having discharged His wrath upon the elements, it was His will to save them by His clemency. But they continued their madness. Such is envy; such is jealousy; it is not easily stayed”.

The Tearing of the Veil in the Temple

In addition to the darkness, the veil of the Temple separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). This thick veil had been embroidered for the newly renovated Temple around 5 BC and the Virgin Mary as a skilled weaver had helped with its construction¹⁹¹ along with four other young virgins at the Temple. The High Priest under Mosaic Law was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies (beyond the veil) only once per year on the Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9:1-7, Leviticus 16:29-34).

The tearing of the veil signified three things:

¹⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

¹⁸⁸ For details of this, see the Study for Holy Saturday.

¹⁸⁹ Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 16.

¹⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

¹⁹¹ Holy Apostles Convent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, Buena Vista, Colo. 81211, p. 71.

1. For those who worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24), with the veil torn, they now have a boldness to enter the Holy of Holies at any time (Hebrews 10:19-22). We do this every time we enter during the Divine Liturgy.
2. For those who serve the physical Temple only, the Temple was going to be opened and trampled by the Romans.
3. The Temple itself mourned for the One that it had been created to worship.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁹² that the tearing of the veil showed that heaven was to be opened, and that the true work was being transferred to the Holy of Holies in heaven.

“Do not marvel if at this time they were perverse, being altogether prepared to set themselves impudently against all things. But observe this other point, how great signs He had wrought, some from Heaven, some on earth, some in the Temple, at once marking His indignation, and at the same time showing that what were unapproachable are now to be entered, and that Heaven shall be opened. The work was transferred to the true Holy of Holies. They said, ‘If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross’ (Matthew 27:42), but He shows that He is King of the whole world. Whereas those men said, ‘You that destroy this temple, and build it in three days’ (Matthew 27:40), He shows that the earthly Temple shall be made forever desolate”.

Theophylact stated¹⁹³ that the tearing of the veil in the Temple signified two things: the coming destruction by the Romans to desecrate the Temple on earth and the breakdown of the barrier that separates man from the Temple in heaven.

“The veil of the temple is torn, the Lord showing through this that the Holy of Holies will now be accessible, and will be given over to the Romans for desecration. The Lord also shows that the veil, which had once separated us from the holy things in heaven, the veil of enmity and sin, is now torn apart. This is the great barrier which separates us from that place”.

Theophylact continued¹⁹⁴ to say that the Temple itself was mourning the death of Christ. Just as man’s flesh is the veil covering the temple of his mind, so the power of the flesh over the spirit was also torn away for all men by the sufferings of Christ

“The veil was also torn as a sign that even the Temple mourned the crucifixion of the Lord. Just as the Jews have the custom of tearing their garments during such calamities, so too the Temple itself, as if it were a living being, showed its grief for the Creator Who suffered, and tore its own garment. The torn veil shows something else as well. Man’s flesh is the veil, or covering, of the Temple, which is his mind. So the power, which the flesh had over the spirit, was torn by the sufferings of Christ, from the top to the bottom, that is, from Adam until the last man. Even Adam was sanctified by the sufferings of Christ, and his flesh will no longer be cursed, or subject to corruption, and likewise incorruption has been bestowed upon us all”.

¹⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

¹⁹³ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 313.

¹⁹⁴ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 137.

The Recognition by the Centurion and the Crowd

In addition to Longinus, the Centurion, the whole crowd that had come together to see the Crucifixion was stunned. Luke states, “And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned home. But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things” (Luke 23:48-49).

The beating of one’s breast was a sign of great sorrow and repentance. We can see this in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, where the “tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13) After seeing the miraculous events associated with the Crucifixion, all the witnesses knew that they had participated in a horrendous mistake. They had been party to the Crucifixion of the Son of God and they knew it. This came back to them with a thud seven weeks later when the Apostle Peter spoke at Pentecost, “‘Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, *whom you crucified*, both Lord and Christ’. Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:36-37).

Theophylact stated¹⁹⁵ that Jesus voluntarily gave up His breath because He had the power to lay down His life and to take it up again. He did not die as an ordinary man but as the Master. The centurion and the crowd recognized this, and, at this point, Jesus began to draw them to Himself.

“When He had cried out with a loud voice, He gave up His breath. He had the power to lay down His life, and to take it back again. It was the Lord's voice itself, together with the other miracles, which caused the centurion to believe. The Lord did not die as an ordinary man, but as the Master. He named death a committal; that is, a deposit for safekeeping, because He intended to receive back His life. His last words, the first such ever spoken by a man completely free of any claim by the devil, made our souls worthy of freedom; for in Christ our souls have likewise been committed to the Father and are no longer held by the devil. Before the death of Christ, the devil had a clear right to our souls. But from the moment that the Son committed His spirit, not to Hades, but into the hands of the Father, our souls were freed from Hades. The very thing which the Lord had said, ‘If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Me’ (John 12:32), is now seen to have been accomplished. When the Lord was lifted up on the Cross, He drew both the thief and the centurion to Himself (Luke 23:43, Matthew 27:54). Certain of the Jews who smote their breasts thereby faulted the crucifiers, and clearly justified Jesus. His disciples fled, but the women, that portion of mankind, who first received the condemnation and the curse for sin, remained and beheld all these things. They were the first to enjoy the justification and the blessing of the Cross, just as they were the first to enjoy the Resurrection”.

Theophylact continued¹⁹⁶ to say that the centurion noted the contrasts present during the Crucifixion, and that this was Someone special on the Cross.

¹⁹⁵ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 313.

¹⁹⁶ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 137.

“When the centurion, that is, the captain of a hundred¹⁹⁷, saw how Jesus as Master of life gave up His life, he marveled and confessed Him. See how the order of things are reversed: the Jews put Him to death, but the Gentiles confess Him, and the disciples flee, while the women remain by His side”.

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹⁹⁸ that the people who smote their breast were crying out against those who crucified Christ, but didn't dare to do it openly.

“Again observe that no sooner had He endured the passion on the Cross for our sakes, than He began to win many to a knowledge the truth; for the centurion, it says, when he saw what had happened glorified God, saying, that truly This Man was righteous. Certain Jews also smote their breasts, being pricked doubtless by their consciences. They looked up with the eyes of their mind to the Lord, and perhaps cleared themselves of their impious conduct against Christ by crying out against those who crucified Him. They dared not do so openly, because of the impiety of the rulers. With truth therefore, did our Lord say, ‘When I have been lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to Me’” (John 12:32).

Good Friday Third Hour Reading: Isaiah 52:13-54:1 "The Suffering Servant"

There is a great deal of content in this Reading and the early Church Fathers quoted it extensively. We will break the Reading up into sections to cover it adequately.

The Lord's Servant Brings in the Gentiles: Isaiah 52:13-15

Behold, My Servant shall understand, and be exalted, and glorified exceedingly. As many shall be amazed at You, so shall Your face be without glory from men, and Your glory *shall not be honored* by the sons of men. Thus shall many nations wonder at Him; and kings shall keep their mouths shut: for they to whom no report was brought concerning Him, shall see; and they who have not heard, shall consider” (Isaiah 52:13-15 LXX).

Christ, in His humanity, is referred to as “My Servant”, as He put aside the glory of the fullness of His Deity in becoming man (Philippians 2:5-8, Colossians 1:19, John 17:5). He didn't relinquish His Deity, but His humanity was a veil or cloak over His Deity. Gregory the Theologian stated¹⁹⁹ that it is a significant thing for Christ to be called Servant. By His doing so, we are intermingled with God and become deified.

“Next is the fact of His being called Servant and serving many well, and that it is a great thing for Him to be called the Child of God. In truth He was in servitude to flesh, to birth and to the conditions of our life with a view to our liberation, and to that of all those whom He has saved, who were in bondage under sin. What greater destiny can befall man's humility than that he should be intermingled with God, and by this intermingling should be deified. We were so visited by the Dayspring from on high (Luke 1:78), that even that Holy Thing that should be born should be called the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:35), and that there should be bestowed on Him a Name which is above every name (Philippians 2:9).

¹⁹⁷ “Centum” in Latin means “hundred”.

¹⁹⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 153, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 611.

¹⁹⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, 4th Theological Oration, III.

What else can this be than God? Every knee will bow to Him That was made of no reputation for us, and That mingled the Form of God with the form of a servant. All the House of Israel will know that God has made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). For all this was done by the action of the Begotten, and by the good pleasure of Him That begot Him”.

Those who knew what was happening (such as the angels) when Christ became incarnate were amazed at Christ’s humility and lack of glory. Yet some mistook His humility for weakness. John Chrysostom stated²⁰⁰ that there was no equal to the insolence showed to Him during the Crucifixion, and to His unutterable tenderness.

“When the sea saw His face, it had reverence and calmed (Matthew 8:26); when the sun beheld it on the cross, it turned away his rays (Luke 23:44-45). When they saw His face, they spit, and struck it with the palms of their hands, and some upon the head (Mark 14:65), giving full swing in every way to their own madness. For indeed they inflicted the blows that are most insulting of all, punching, slapping with the palms of their hands, and to these blows adding the insult of spitting at Him. With much derision they said, ‘prophesy to us, Christ, who is he that hit you?’” (Matthew 26:67-68)

The result is the entry of the Gentiles as the people of God. John Chrysostom stated²⁰¹ that the people who shall see and consider what they had not been told are the same as what Paul referred to:

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard²⁰²,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The prophet spoke here of the whole human race. The prophets heard, but the prophetic ear was not the ear ‘of man’. Before hearing, it had not entered into the heart of man. After the gift of the Spirit, the heart of the Prophets was not the heart of man, but a spiritual heart. Chrysostom continues:

“Before we had the blessing of the Spirit and learned the things which no man can speak, no one of us or even of the Prophets conceived them in his mind. How should we? Since not even angels know them. But now, ‘We have the mind of Christ’” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

“What kind of things then are these? Namely that by the foolishness of preaching He shall overcome the world, and the nations shall be brought in, and there shall be reconciliation of God with men, and so great blessings shall come upon us!”

“How then have we ‘known’? God has revealed them by His Spirit; not by external wisdom. This is not like some dishonored handmaid that has been permitted to enter in, and stoop down and look into the mysteries pertaining to the Lord. The difference between this wisdom and that is great. The things which angels did not know, these are what Wisdom has taught us. But external wisdom

²⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXV, 1.

²⁰¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VII, 6-7.

²⁰² This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 64:4. Chrysostom stated that the exact Old Testament wording had been lost. See 2 Kings 22:8, 2 Chronicles 34:14. During times of apostasy, copies of the Scriptures were thrown out, often intentionally, and those who were bent on restoration had difficulty finding copies.

(i.e. of the world) has done the contrary. Not only has she failed to instruct, but she hindered and obstructed, and after the event sought to obscure His doings, trying to make the Cross of no effect. Not simply by our receiving the knowledge, does he describe the honor given to us, nor by our receiving it with angels, but, what is more, by His Spirit conveying it to us”.

Chrysostom added²⁰³ that the entry of the Gentiles as the people of God was amazing, considering where they came from. Just as amazing was the blindness of His own people to the barrage of information that could have led them to the Faith.

“It is a thing indeed worthy of our amazement, how they who were nurtured in knowledge of the prophetic books, how they heard Moses every day telling them ten thousand things concerning the coming of the Christ, and the other prophets afterwards. They beheld Christ Himself daily working miracles among them, giving up His time to them alone. He had not as yet allowed His disciples to depart into the way of the Gentiles, or to enter into a city of Samaritans, nor did so Himself; but everywhere declared that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5). While they saw the signs, heard the Prophets, and had Christ Himself continually reminding them, they yet made themselves once for all so blind and dull, as by none of these things to be brought to faith in Christ (Matthew 15:24). On the other hand those of the Gentiles, who had enjoyed none of these things, never heard the oracles of God, but were ever ranging among the fables of madmen, for heathen philosophy is this. Their way of life was more impure and more accursed than their doctrine. Still, fallen as they were as low as the very depth of wickedness, all of a sudden, they have appeared to us shining from on high, and from the summit of heaven”.

Apostolic Preaching: Christ’s Humility at the Cross: Isaiah 53:1-3

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He had no form and He had no majesty that we should look at Him; and He had no attractiveness that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, and like one from whom men hide their faces, and we despised Him, and we did not value Him” (Isaiah 53:1-3 Dead Sea Scrolls).

The Apostolic Preaching

The Apostle Paul quoted this part of Isaiah (Romans 10:16) and stated that it applied to the preaching of the Apostles. Paul said,

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Joel 2:32). How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ (Isaiah 53:1) So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not

²⁰³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IX, 1.

heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’ (Psalm 19:4). But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation’ (Deuteronomy 32:21). But Isaiah is very bold and says: ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me’. But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people’ (Isaiah 65:1-2).

There are two meanings to Isaiah’s words “We brought a report as *of a child*” (Isaiah 53:2 LXX). One refers to the child-like faith in the body of Christ (Matthew 10:14-15) in response to the Apostolic preaching, and the other to the Incarnation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Justin Martyr applied²⁰⁴ the “dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2) to the Gentiles as they soaked up the preaching of the Apostles. As Christ sent them out, they did not believe their own report²⁰⁵, but in the power of Him who sent them.

“Moreover, the prescription that twelve bells be attached to the robe of the high priest (Exodus 28:33-34), which hung down to the feet, was a symbol of the twelve apostles, who depend on the power of Christ, the eternal Priest (Hebrews 4:14-15, 8:1). Through their voice, all the earth has been filled with the glory and grace of God and of His Christ. David also says, ‘Their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world’ (Psalm 19:4). Isaiah speaks as if he were impersonating the Apostles, when they say to Christ that they didn’t believe in their own report, but in the power of Him who sent them. So he says: ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed? We have preached before Him as if He were a root in a dry ground’ (Isaiah 53:1-2)”.

John Chrysostom interpreted²⁰⁶ the reference to “dry ground” as referring to the Incarnation and the virginity of Mary.

“Since that which was to happen was so strange as to be disbelieved by many even when it had taken place, He first of all sent prophets beforehand, announcing this very fact. For instance the patriarch predicted it saying, ‘You sprang from a tender shoot my Son; You laid down and slumbered as a lion’ (Genesis 49:9). Isaiah said, ‘Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call His name Emmanuel’ (Isaiah 7:14). Elsewhere again, ‘We beheld Him as a root in a dry ground’ (Isaiah 53:2), and by the dry ground he means the virgin’s womb. Again ‘unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given’ (Isaiah 9:6). Again ‘there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall spring out of his root’ (Isaiah 11:1). Baruch in the book of Jeremiah said, ‘This is our God; no other shall be reckoned by the side of Him. He found out every path of knowledge and gave it to Jacob His servant, and Israel his beloved. After these things also He appeared on the earth, and held converse with men’ (Baruch 3:35-37 LXX). David signifying His incarnate presence said, ‘He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool, and like the drop which distills

²⁰⁴ Justin Martyr, Dialogue With Trypho, 42.

²⁰⁵ I.e. it was so incredible regarding how the whole world responded to their preaching.

²⁰⁶ John Chrysostom, Homily Against Marcionites and Manichaeans, 3.

upon the earth' (Psalm 72:6 LXX), because He noiselessly and gently entered into the Virgin's womb".

Christ's Physical Appearance at the Cross

Isaiah's reference to Christ's lack of physical beauty (Isaiah 53:2 LXX) refers to the violence of the Crucifixion: the scourging, the beatings and the bloodshed. Yet there are two portraits of Christ in the Scriptures: one describing His beauty and the other His lack of beauty.

Tertullian stated²⁰⁷ that the lack of beauty refers to the Crucifixion and this is contrasted with the beauty of the fullness of the Godhead in Him.

"Christ may have been inglorious, ignoble and dishonored; for such was it announced that He should be, both in bodily condition and aspect. Isaiah says, 'We have announced His way before Him. He is like a servant, like a root in a dry ground. He has no form or comeliness. We saw Him, and He had neither form nor beauty; but His form was despised, marred above all men' (Isaiah 52:14, 53:2 LXX). Similarly the Father addressed the Son just before. 'Inasmuch as many will be astonished at You, so also will Your beauty be without glory from men' (Isaiah 52:14). For although, in David's words, 'He is fairer than the children of men' (Psalm 45:2 LXX), yet it is in that figurative state of spiritual grace, when He is girded with the sword of the Spirit, which is truly His form, beauty, and glory. David also said that He is in bodily condition 'a worm, and not a man; a reproach of men, and an outcast of the people' (Psalm 22:6). But no internal quality of such a kind does He announce as belonging to Him. In Him dwelt the fullness of the Spirit; therefore I acknowledge Him to be 'the rod of the stem of Jesse'" (Isaiah 11:1 LXX).

John Chrysostom stated²⁰⁸ that the lack of comeliness of Christ had two aspects. One was in comparison to His Deity; the other in describing the dishonor He experienced at the Cross.

"Not only in working wonders was He wonderful, but even when merely showing Himself, He was full of great grace. To declare this the prophet said, 'Fair in beauty beyond the children of men' (Psalm 45:2 LXX). If Isaiah said, 'He had no form and He had no majesty that we should look at Him; and He had no attractiveness that we should desire Him' (Isaiah 53:2 LXX), this could refer to a comparison with the glory of His Godhead, which surpasses all utterance and description. Or one could say that this refers to what took place at His passion, and the dishonor which He underwent at the season of the cross, and the low estate which throughout His life He exemplified in all respects".

Basil the Great stated²⁰⁹ that the reason that Christ was lacking in physical beauty is because of the work that He chose to do at the Cross. In His humanity, He chose to be poor, ignoble and inferior, just as a physician chooses to stoop to heal the sick.

"In what is it extraordinary that He who 'is the Word and was made flesh' (John 1:14) confesses His Father to be greater than Himself, when He was seen in glory inferior to the angels, and in form to men? For 'You have made him a little

²⁰⁷ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 3, 17.

²⁰⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVII, 3.

²⁰⁹ Basil the Great, Letter to the Caesareans, VIII, 5.

lower than the angels' (Hebrews 2:5), and 'we saw Him and He had neither form nor comeliness, his form was deficient beyond all men' (Isaiah 53:2-3 LXX). All this He endured on account of His abundant loving kindness towards His work, that He might save the lost sheep and bring it home when He had saved it. Will the heretic, because the carpenter's son had no bed to lie on, complain of His being poor? This is why the Son is less than the Father; for your sakes He was made dead to free you from death and make you sharer in heavenly life. For the heretic to complain is as though someone were to find fault with the physician for stooping to sickness, and breathing its foul breath, that he may heal the sick.

Tertullian addressed²¹⁰ heresies in his day that claimed that Christ had some kind of "heavenly flesh", different from our own. Tertullian refuted this notion and said that Christ's physical body was not characterized by a handsome appearance.

"The characteristics which we have enumerated are so many proofs that His was earthy flesh, as ours is; but anything new or anything strange I do not discover. Indeed it was from His words and actions only, from His teaching and miracles solely, that men, though amazed, owned Christ to be man. But if there had been in Him any new kind of flesh miraculously obtained from the stars, it would have been certainly well known. As the case stood, however, it was actually the ordinary condition of His terrene flesh which made all other things about Him wonderful, as when they said, 'Where did this man obtain this wisdom and these mighty works?' (Matthew 13:54) Those who said this despised His outward form. So His body did not reach even to human beauty, to say nothing of heavenly glory. Had the prophets given us no information whatever concerning His ignoble appearance, His very sufferings and the snobbish contempt He endured says everything. The sufferings attested His human flesh, the contempt proved its abject condition. Would any man have dared to touch even with his little finger, the body of Christ, if it had been of an unusual nature? Would any man have dared to smear His face with spit, if it had not invited it, by its abject appearance?"

Christ Was Crucified for Us: Isaiah 53:4-6

"Surely He has borne our sufferings and carried our sorrows; yet we considered Him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6 Dead Sea Scrolls).

Christ Bore Our Infirmities and Sicknesses

The Gospel writer, Matthew, quoted Isaiah to explain what was happening when Jesus healed uncounted multitudes. From Matthew 8:16-17

"When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses'" (Isaiah 53:4).

²¹⁰ Tertullian, On the Flesh of Christ, II, v, 9.

Paul wrote that the handwriting of requirements against us was nailed to the cross. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14). The way this happened and the mechanism involved was Christ taking our infirmities and bearing our sicknesses.

Just prior to His death on the Cross, Jesus stated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46) Jesus, in His Deity, is always in the Father, and the Father is in Him (John 14:10-11). In His sinless humanity, He is always beloved by the Father (Matthew 17:5). Therefore, neither in His Divinity nor in His humanity was He ever forsaken by the Father. But when He took our sin on Himself, then He was “forsaken”. As Paul said, “For the Father made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Tertullian, writing to a heretic named Praxaes, stated²¹¹ that the death of Christ in the flesh was His being “forsaken” by the Father. In all other respects the Father did not forsake the Son, for it was into His Father’s hands that the Son committed His spirit.

“Did the Son suffer, being ‘forsaken’ by the Father, and the Father suffered nothing, since He forsook the Son? Or was it the Father who suffered; and if so, then to what God was it that He addressed His cry? This was the voice of flesh and soul, that is to say, of man, not of the Word and Spirit. It was uttered so as to prove the impassability of God, who ‘forsook’ His Son, so far as He handed over His human substance to the suffering of death. Paul also perceived this, when he writes to this effect, ‘If the Father spared not His own Son’ (Romans 8:32). Isaiah likewise perceived this, when he declared, ‘And the Lord has delivered Him up for our offenses’ (Isaiah 53:5-6). In this manner He ‘forsook’ Him, in *not sparing* Him; ‘forsook’ Him, in *delivering Him up*. In all other respects the Father did not forsake the Son, for it was into His Father’s hands that the Son committed His spirit (Luke 23:46). Indeed, after so committing it, He instantly died; and as the Spirit remained with the flesh, the flesh cannot undergo the full extent of death, *i.e., in corruption and decay*. For the Son, therefore, to die amounted to His being forsaken by the Father. The Son, then, both dies and rises again, according to the Scriptures. It is the Son, too, who ascends to the heights of heaven, and also descends to the inner parts of the earth”.

John Chrysostom noted²¹² that Isaiah’s words “He has borne our sufferings and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4 DSS) seemed to apply to sins, but the Gospel writer Matthew applied the words to diseases (Matthew 8:16-17). Chrysostom connected these together since most of our diseases arise from sins of the soul.

“Do you see the multitude, by this time, growing in faith? For not even when the time pressed could they endure to depart, nor did they account it unseasonable to bring their sick to Him at evening”.

²¹¹ Tertullian, Against Praxaes, II, vii, 30.

²¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVII, 2.

“But note how the evangelists pass quickly over so great a multitude of persons that were healed, not mentioning one by one, and giving us an account of them, but in one word covering an unspeakable sea of miracles. Then lest the greatness of the wonder should drive us again to unbelief, that even so great a people and their various diseases should be delivered and healed by Him in one moment of time, He brings in the prophet also to bear witness to what is going on. This indicates the abundance of the proof we have, in every case, out of the Scriptures. He said that Isaiah spoke of these things, ‘He took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses’ (Isaiah 53:4). He did not say, ‘He did them away’, but ‘He took and bore them’. This seems to me to be spoken rather of sins, by the prophet, in harmony with John, where he said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God, that bears the sin of the world’” (John 1:29, 36).

“How then does the evangelist here apply it to diseases? Either as rehearsing the passage in the historical sense, or to show that most of our disease arises from sins of the soul. For if the sum of all, death itself, has its root and foundation from sin, much more the majority of our diseases also. Our very capability of suffering did itself originate there”.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated²¹³ that Christ carried our infirmities, not just remedied them. If He remedied them as being something external to the body, rather than taking them on as His own, He would have left us still subject to death.

“Thus it might be shown, and all might believe, that whereas He was God, and hallowed those to whom He came (in the Old Testament), afterwards for our sakes He became man, and ‘bodily,’ the Godhead dwelt in the flesh. Being God, He had His own body, and using this as an instrument, He became man for our sakes. And on account of this, the properties of the flesh are said to be His, since He was in it, such as to hunger, to thirst, to suffer, to weary, and the like, of which the flesh is capable. On the other hand the works proper to the Word Himself, such as to raise the dead, to restore sight to the blind, and to cure the woman with an issue of blood, He did through His own body. And the Word bore the infirmities of the flesh, as His own, for His was the flesh; and the flesh ministered to the works of the Godhead, because the Godhead was in it, for the body was God’s. And well has the Prophet said ‘carried’ (Isaiah 53:4) and has not said, ‘He remedied our infirmities’. Otherwise, as the Godhead being external to the body, and only healing it, as He has always done, He should leave men subject still to death. But He carries our infirmities, and He Himself bears our sins, that it might be shown that He has become man for us, and that the body which in Him bore them, was His own body. And while He received no hurt Himself by ‘bearing our sins in His body on the tree’ (1 Peter 2:24), we men were redeemed from our own affections, and were filled with the righteousness of the Word”.

Basil the Great stated²¹⁴ that Christ continues to take our infirmities on Himself in His fellowship with us. As we feed, clothe, etc. the members of the Body of Christ, we do so to the Lord Himself. The converse is also true; as we suffer for His sake, He bears this suffering.

“It is written, ‘But when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him’ (1

²¹³ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxvi, 31.

²¹⁴ Basil the Great, Letter to the Caesareans, VIII, 8.

Corinthians 15:28, Hebrews 2:8-10). For He makes your subjection His own; and because of your struggling against goodness He calls Himself unsubjected. In this sense too He once spoke of Himself as persecuted. ‘Saul, Saul’, He says, ‘why do you persecute Me?’ on the occasion when Saul was hurrying to Damascus with a desire to imprison the disciples. Again He calls Himself naked, when any one of his brethren is naked. ‘I was naked and you clothed Me’ (Matthew 25:36), and so when another is in prison He spoke of Himself as imprisoned, for He Himself took away our sins and bore our sicknesses. Now one of our infirmities is not being subject, and He bore this. So all the things which happen to us to our hurt He makes His own, taking upon Him our sufferings in His fellowship with us”.

Tertullian compared²¹⁵ Christ’s healing to the prophecy of Isaiah. “Carrying” our sorrows means the same thing as taking them away, and removing unclean spirits implies healing sickness.

“Christ touched others, upon whom He laid His hands. He was therefore the Christ of Isaiah, the healer of our sicknesses. ‘Surely’, says he, ‘He has borne our grief and *carried* our sorrows’ (Isaiah 53:4). Now the Greeks are accustomed to use for *carry* a word which also signifies to *take away*. To liberate men, then, from evil spirits, is a cure of sickness”.

Our Punishment Was Upon Him

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5 Dead Sea Scrolls).

The Scriptures state that Christ “learned obedience”, and it is this that Isaiah refers to. Paul wrote in Hebrews, “Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:5-9). By “a Son”, Paul means the Son of God and equal to the Father in His Divinity. “Learning obedience” refers to the conflict between His human will and His divine will, the Will of God. We see this in the Garden of Gethsemane,

“And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done’. Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:41-44).

During our striving for righteousness, we have the fear of God. The fear of God is part of the struggle, but fear is done away with when love is perfected. Even Christ was described as having a godly fear in learning obedience by the things which He suffered. Even Christ was described as having been perfected (Hebrews 5:7-9); i.e. perfected in His flesh, for He was always perfect in His Deity.

John Chrysostom stated²¹⁶ that it is in reference to the flesh that lowly things are spoken concerning Christ.

²¹⁵ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 8.

²¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, VIII, 3.

“‘He learned to obey God’ (Hebrews 5:8, 9). Here he shows how great is the gain of sufferings. But if He, being the Son, gained obedience from His sufferings, much more shall we. Do you see how many things he discourses about obedience, that they might be persuaded to it?”

Sheep Going Astray: Isaiah 53:6-7

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth” (Isaiah 53:6-7).

Sheep have behavior habits that are very much like people. Without really considering what they are doing or what dangers they will encounter, sheep tend to wander away from the safety of the fold. The shepherd needs to have an eye for this and bring them back as they get too far from safety. Christ described Himself as the Good Shepherd Who cares for His sheep (John 10:1-16), and Peter compared shepherding to caring for the Church. “You were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25).

Herding sheep²¹⁷ was an important occupation in Jesus’ day. The owner of a large flock was considered wealthy because the sheep provided food and clothing. The owner of the flock often did not care for the sheep himself, but entrusted their care to a shepherd. The shepherd, in turn, hired others (hirelings) to help him. Any sheep that were lost to predators, such as lions (Judges 14:5-6), bears (2 Kings 2:24-25), and even hyenas, the shepherd had to reimburse the owner. To protect their flock, shepherds became skilled in the use of a rod (a heavy, nail-studded club) and a sling. Ammunition for the sling were smooth round rocks about 1.5 inches in diameter. This is what David used to kill Goliath (1 Samuel 17:48-50). The sling was also used by the army and the Tribe of Benjamin at one time had 700 left-handed slingers who could hit a hair’s width and not miss (Judges 20:16).

Shepherds also used their sling to control their sheep. If a sheep were to wander off too far, a well-placed stone shattering against a nearby rock would scare the sheep into returning to the flock. If a sheep was tired or sick, the shepherd carried it on his shoulders (Luke 15:5). If a sheep was lost, the shepherd went to search for it (Psalm 119:176, Luke 15:3-6), leaving the care of the rest of the sheep temporarily to the hirelings. The hirelings have no stake with the sheep, and therefore are not willing to fight for the safety of the sheep (John 10:12-13). But they can take care of the sheep for a short time, while the shepherd looks for a lost sheep.

Clement of Alexandria stated²¹⁸ that Christ was “assigned to our sins” in the sense that we are like sheep that continually wander away and need to be returned to the sheepfold for our own benefit. Christ continues to shepherd us as a corrector and reformer in our waywardness.

“If those who are corrected (by secular government) receive good at the hands of justice, and, according to Plato, what is just is acknowledged to be good, fear itself does good, and has been found to be for men’s good. ‘For the soul that fears the Lord shall live, for their hope is in Him who saves them’ (Ecclesiasticus 35:14-15). This same Word who inflicts punishment is judge; regarding whom

²¹⁷ Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1998, pp. 133-145.

²¹⁸ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, I, 8.

Isaiah also says, ‘The Lord has assigned Him to our sins’ (Isaiah 53:6), plainly as a corrector and reformer of sins. Wherefore He alone, who has been appointed by the Father, is able to forgive our iniquities as Instructor of us all. He alone it is who is able to distinguish between disobedience and obedience. While He threatens, He is unwilling to inflict evil to execute His threatening. But by inspiring men with fear, He cuts off the approach to sin, and shows His love to man, still delaying, and declaring what they shall suffer if they continue sinners. He is not like a serpent, which, the moment it fastens on its prey, devours it.

Silent (Dumb) Before His Shearers

It is in comparison to this that Isaiah stated that Christ did not complain (Isaiah 53:7) as He was sheared of His human life. And it was the mystery of this part of Isaiah’s prophecy that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when the Deacon Philip met him (Acts 8:32-33).

Ambrose of Milan stated²¹⁹ that those who crucified Christ were called “shearers” because they sheared off His humanity, which was added to Him; but they could not shear off His Essence on the Cross. He laid aside His body but did not lose His Divinity.

The two most important times of the year to a shepherd were “lambing time” in January or February (after about a 5-month gestation period) and sheep shearing in the heat of late summer. Since sheep shearing came in the days of harvest, it was followed by several days of celebration.

Sheep shearing methods today use electric-powered clippers. The sheep is held by the back of the neck and set down vertically on its rump. First the belly is sheared, then the sides, and finally the back. During this process, the sheep is unusually quiet and calm, with no bleating and no struggling, and thus the allusion to Christ before Herod is quite appropriate. In ancient times, scissors or straight razors were used instead of electric clippers, but the behavior of the sheep was the same.

Tertullian stated²²⁰ that the allusion to a lamb being dumb before its shearers refers to Jesus’ total silence before Herod. This Herod was the one who had John the Baptist (Jesus’ cousin) beheaded two years earlier, and he thought that Jesus was the re-incarnated John (Matthew 14:2). He had heard of Jesus’ miracles, and he was looking for Jesus to put on a show like the ones Simon Magus²²¹ put on.

“The Lord Himself came to a trial with ‘the elders and rulers of the people’ (Isaiah 3:13-14 LXX). Then He fulfilled all that had been written of His passion. At that time ‘the heathen raged, and the people imagined vain things; the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers gathered themselves together against the Lord and against His Christ’ (Psalm 2:1-2). The *heathen* were Pilate and the Romans; the *people* were the tribes of Israel; the *kings* were represented in Herod, and the *rulers* in the chief priests. When He was sent to Herod

²¹⁹ Ambrose of Milan, Letters, LXIII, 93.

²²⁰ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 42.

Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 20.

²²¹ For more information about the life of Simon Magus, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, Unpublished Work, 2003. Simon lived in Samaria, not too far from Herod’s palace, and Herod was undoubtedly familiar with Simon’s displays of “magic”.

gratuitously by Pilate (Luke 23:7), the words of Hosea were accomplished, for he had prophesied of Christ, ‘They shall carry Him bound as a present to the king’ (Hosea 10:6 LXX). Herod was ‘exceedingly glad’ (Luke 23:8-9) when he saw Jesus, but he heard not a word from Him. For, ‘as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:7), because ‘the Lord had given to Him a disciplined tongue, that he might know how and when it behooved Him to speak’ (Isaiah 50:4 LXX) — even that ‘tongue which clinged to His jaws’ (Psalm 22:15), as the Psalm said it should, through His not speaking.

Cyril of Jerusalem noted²²² that Christ and His Apostles were both referred to as sheep and as shepherds:

“Christ is called a Door; but do not take the name literally for a thing of wood, but a spiritual, a living Door, discriminating those who enter in. He is called a Way, not one trodden by feet, but leading to the Father in heaven. He is called a Sheep, not an irrational one, but the one which through its precious blood cleanses the world from its sins, which is led before the shearers, and knows when to be silent. This Sheep again is called a Shepherd, who says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd’ (John 10:11); a Sheep because of His manhood, a Shepherd because of the loving-kindness of His Godhead. Do you know that there are rational sheep? Christ says to the Apostles, ‘Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves’” (Matthew 10:16).

The Sacrifice of Isaac²²³

There is also an analogy between Christ’s Passion and the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham. When Isaac was young, the Lord told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on a mountain top (Genesis 22:1-2). Jewish tradition places²²⁴ this mountain top as the site where the Temple in Jerusalem was later built²²⁵. However offering Isaac as a sacrifice was contrary to the Lord’s Law (which forbade human sacrifice) and was seemingly contrary to the Lord’s promise that his posterity would be numbered through Isaac (Genesis 17:16-19). This did not deter Abraham, even after the three-day journey to get there; he told his two servants that he and Isaac were going to worship the Lord on the mountain top and then return (Genesis 22:5). Isaac asked his father: “Where was the lamb for the burnt offering?” They brought wood and fire, but no animal. Abraham replied that “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8). In saying this, Abraham seems to have understood the coming of the Son of God as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). Abraham concluded that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead if that was His plan (Hebrews 11:17-19). Josephus stated²²⁶ that Isaac shared Abraham’s faith and willingly climbed up on the altar to be sacrificed.

John Chrysostom stated²²⁷ that Isaac, laying on the altar, exhibited the same attitude as did Christ on the Cross at His Crucifixion.

²²² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, X, 3.

²²³ For more details regarding the sacrifice of Isaac and its similarity to that of Jephthah’s daughter, see the Study for Holy Saturday under the chapter on Genesis 22.

²²⁴ Gower, *Manners and Customs of Bible Times* 1987, p. 203

²²⁵ See 2 Chronicles 3:1.

²²⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, I, xiii, 4.

²²⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, III, 7.

“Isaac asked his question about the lamb (Genesis 22:8) not of impertinence, not of curiosity, but as anxious about what was proposed. He reflected that had his father not meant to make him a partner in what was done, he would not have left the servants below, and taken him only with him. For this reason, when they were alone, he asked him, when none heard what was said. So great was the judgment of the lad. Are you not all warmed towards him, both men and women, and marvel at his judgment; and venerate the piety which, when he was both bound and laid on the wood, made him not be dismayed nor struggle nor accuse his father as being mad? But he was even bound and lifted up and laid upon it, and endured all in silence, like a lamb, rather like the common Lord of all. ‘He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before his shearer’ (Isaiah 53:7). Yet Isaac spoke; for his Lord spoke also. How was he dumb then? This means, he spoke nothing willful or harsh, but all was humble and mild, and the words more than the silence manifested his gentleness. For Christ also said, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’ (John 18:23) He showed His gentleness more than if He had kept His peace. As Isaac spoke with his father from the altar, so too does Christ from the Cross, saying, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing’ (Luke 23:34). What then said the Patriarch? ‘God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering, my son’” (Genesis 22:8.).

Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (John 8:56). Athanasius of Alexandria stated²²⁸ that this occurred at the offering of Isaac, which prefigured the day of His Crucifixion.

“Thus the patriarch Abraham rejoiced to see not his own day, but that of the Lord. Looking forward ‘he saw it, and was glad’ (John 8:56). In offering his son, he worshipped the Son of God. Being restrained from sacrificing Isaac, he saw the Messiah in the ram, which was offered up instead as a sacrifice to God (Genesis 22:13). The patriarch was tried through Isaac, not that he was sacrificed, but He who was pointed out in Isaiah: ‘He shall be led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers he shall be speechless’ (Isaiah 53:7). On this account Abraham was restrained from laying his hand on the lad. This was done lest the Jews, taking occasion from the sacrifice of Isaac, should reject the prophetic declarations concerning our Savior, especially those uttered by the Psalmist. ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; but a body You have prepared Me’ (Psalm 40:6), and referred all such things as these to the son of Abraham”.

Christ’s Generation: Isaiah 53:8-9

“In *His* humiliation His judgment was taken away; who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth; because of the iniquities of my people He was led to death. And I will give the wicked for His burial, and the rich for His death; for He practiced no iniquity, nor craft with His mouth” (Isaiah 53:8-9 LXX).

²²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, VI, 8.

His Judgment Taken Away

At Jesus' trial before Pilate, He was humiliated so much by the mocking, the scourging, the spitting, the slapping, the crown of thorns, the robe and the shouting of the crowds that he couldn't possibly get a fair trial. This was the intent of the Jewish leaders: that a fair judgment should be taken away.

John Chrysostom outlined²²⁹ how both the "trial" before the Sanhedrin and the "trial" before Pilate were orchestrated by the Jewish leaders to "take His judgment away".

"It is clear that both the tearing the garment and the amazement of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 26:64-65) were a pretense. All things they stacked up against Him in order to bring Him to death."

"Pilate asked the same questions. What then said Christ? 'It is as you say' (Matthew 27:11). He confessed that He was a king, but a heavenly king, which elsewhere He spoke more dearly, replying to Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). Neither the Jewish leaders nor Pilate should have an excuse for accusing Him of such things. He gives a reason that cannot be argued, saying, 'If I were of this world, my servants would fight, that I should not be delivered'. In order to refute this suspicion, He both paid tribute, and commanded others to pay it (Matthew 22:17-22), and when they tried to make Him a king, He fled" (John 6:15).

"Why then did he not bring forward these things, at that time, when accused of usurpation? Because having proof from His deeds, His power, His meekness, His gentleness, beyond number, they were willfully blind, and dealt unfairly, and the tribunal was corrupt. For these reasons He replied to nothing, but held His peace. Yet He answered briefly (so as not to get the reputation of arrogance from continual silence) when the high priest adjured Him, and when the governor asked; but in reply to their accusations He no longer said anything. He was now not likely to persuade them. Even as the prophet declaring this self-same thing from of old, said, 'In His humiliation His judgment was taken away'" (Isaiah 53:8).

"At these things the governor marveled, and indeed it was worthy of admiration to see Him showing such great forbearance, and holding His peace, Him that had countless things to say. They didn't accuse Him of knowing any evil thing, but they accused Him from jealousy and envy only. When they had to set up false witness (Mark 14:56), why did they still urge their point? When they saw Judas was dead (Matthew 27:3-5), and that Pilate had washed his hands of it (Matthew 27:24), why were they not pricked with remorse? He did many things even at that time, that they might recover themselves, but by none were they amended. What then said Pilate? 'Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?' (Matthew 27:13) Pilate wished that He would defend Himself and be acquitted; but since He answered nothing, he devised another thing: the attempt to release Jesus instead of Barabbas."

Christ's Generation

"Christ's generation" refers to His birth from the Virgin Mary. As Gabriel explained to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you;

²²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVI, 1.

therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). To explain exactly how this occurred is not possible. But it was necessary in order to join us to God.

Cyril of Jerusalem stated²³⁰ that the “generation” that Isaiah referred to was Christ’s Deity. His eternal begotten-ness of the Father is unknowable by human wisdom, and therefore who can declare it? Athanasius of Alexandria and others stated²³¹ that the Father only knows how He generated the Son.

“If you hear the Gospel saying, ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham’ (Matthew 1:1), understand ‘according to the flesh’. He is the Son of David at the end of the ages, but the Son of God *before all ages*, without beginning. The flesh, which before He had not, He received; but the other which He has, He has eternally as begotten of the Father. Two fathers He has: one, David, according to the flesh, and one, God, His Father in a Divine manner. As the Son of David, He is subject to time, and to handling, and to genealogical descent. But as Son according to the Godhead, He is subject neither to time, to place, nor to genealogical descent; for ‘His generation who shall declare?’ (Isaiah 53:8) God is a Spirit; He who is a Spirit is spiritually begotten, as being incorporeal, an inscrutable and incomprehensible generation. The Son Himself says of the Father, ‘The Lord said unto Me, You are My Son, today have I begotten You’ (Psalm 2:7). Now this today is not recent, but eternal: a timeless today, before all ages. ‘From the womb, before the morning star, have I begotten You’” (Psalm 110:3).

Irenaeus wrote²³² that we could not attain immortality unless we were united to immortality that had become flesh like us. When Christ became flesh, His flesh veiled the Godhead, and it was only by the Holy Spirit that any was able to recognize Him.

“By no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons?”

“For this reason, it is said, ‘Who shall declare His generation?’ (Isaiah 53:8) Since ‘He is a man, and who shall recognize Him?’ (Jeremiah 17:9 LXX) But he, to whom the Father which is in heaven has revealed Him (Matthew 16:16-17), knows Him. We understands that He is the Son of man, who ‘was not born either by the will of the flesh, or by the will of man’ (John 1:13); this is Christ, the Son of the living God. I have shown from the Scriptures, that no one of the sons of Adam is called God, or named Lord. He is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, and Lord, and King Eternal, and the Incarnate

²³⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XI, 5.

²³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, De Synodis, II, 28.

Athanasius of Alexandria, Statement of Faith, in Epistola Eusebii, 1.

Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, III, 11, 88.

Hilary of Potiers, On the Trinity, II, 21.

²³² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xix, 1-2.

Word. This may be seen by anyone who has attained even a small portion of the truth”.

The Wicked for His Burial

“And I will give the wicked for His burial, and the rich for His death; for He practiced no iniquity, nor craft with His mouth” (Isaiah 53:9).

Tertullian maintains²³³ that “the wicked for His burial” refers to those who had strenuously maintained that His corpse had been stolen. This included the lying report of the soldiers, from bribery by the Jewish leaders (Matthew 28:11-15), that His body had been taken away. He also stated that “the rich for His death” refers to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who donated his own unused tomb, plus the cost of the materials for Jesus’ burial (John 19:38-42).

To understand the significance of Jesus’ burial, which was something only the rich could afford, we might compare the funeral of the son of the widow of Nain. The dead man was being carried in an open coffin (Luke 7:14). When Jesus spoke to him, “Young man, I say to you, arise” (Luke 7:14), he sat up and began to speak immediately. There was no need to “unbind him” as was necessary for Lazarus when he was raised (John 11:44). This is because Lazarus and Jesus were given a rich man’s burial, where the dead body was wrapped in special materials to create a mummy-like casing.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped Jesus’ body in strips of linen with about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, creating a “mummy” or a cocoon (John 19:39-40). Gower states²³⁴ how this was done. “The dead body was covered in spices and in paste and this was tied to the body by layers of white roller bandage. The paste hardened and impregnated the bandages until a hard preservative mold or cocoon was formed about the body. A cap was put on the head, and often the jaw was held in position by a bandage under the chin”. When Peter and John came to the Tomb on the morning of the 16th of Nisan (Pascha morning), they “saw the linen clothes lying there” (John 20:5-6). This is the undisturbed 100-pound cocoon; Jesus had passed through the burial wrappings of the cocoon as He rose, leaving them lying there. No wonder that John and Peter saw and believed²³⁵ when presented with this evidence (John 20:8).

John Chrysostom added²³⁶ that Christ’s Oneness with the Father and the wickedness of those who orchestrated His death would be obvious from the events that followed.

“You shall know both My power and My unanimity with the Father. Because ‘of Myself I speak nothing’ (John 8:28, 8:14-18), shows that His Substance does not differ from that of the Father, and He utters nothing except that which is in the mind of the Father. ‘When you have been driven away from your place of worship, and you are not allowed to serve Him as before, then you shall know that He does this to avenge Me, and because He is angry with those who would not hear Me’. As though He had said, ‘Had I been an enemy and a stranger to God, He would not have stirred up such wrath against you’. This also Isaiah declares, ‘He shall give the wicked in return for His burial’ (Isaiah 53:9

²³³ Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 3, 23.

²³⁴ Gower, *New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, pp. 72-74

²³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, LXXXV, 4.

²³⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, LIII, 2.

LXX); and David, ‘Then shall He speak to them in His wrath’ (Psalm 2:5); and Christ Himself, ‘Behold, your house is left to you desolate’ (Matthew 23:38). His parables declare the same thing when He says, ‘What shall the Lord of that vineyard do to those husbandmen? He shall miserably destroy those wicked men’” (Matthew 21:40, 41).

The Sinless Christ

“He practiced no iniquity, nor craft with His mouth” (Isaiah 53:9). Christ had advantages over us due to His being without sin. The results of this are outlined by John Chrysostom and John of Damascus as follows.

Chrysostom stated²³⁷ that Christ, by being sinless, exchanged curses with us. This was like an innocent man dying for another, who had been sentenced to death.

“People were subject to a curse, which says, ‘Cursed is everyone that continues not in the things that are written in the book of the Law’ (Deuteronomy 27:26). To this curse, people were subject, for no man had continued in, or was a keeper of, the whole Law; but Christ exchanged this curse for the other, ‘Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13). Both he who hanged on a tree and he who transgresses the Law are cursed. It was necessary for him, who is about to relieve from a curse, himself to be free from it, and to receive another instead of it; therefore Christ took upon Him our curse, and thereby relieved us from it. It was like an innocent man’s undertaking to die for another sentenced to death, and so rescuing him from punishment. Christ took upon Him not the curse of transgression, but the other curse, in order to remove that of others. For, ‘He had done no violence neither was any deceit in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22). By dying He rescued from death those who were dying, so by taking upon Himself the curse, He delivered them from it”.

Many of the Church Fathers compared the “tree” that Christ died on to the “tree” that caused mankind to fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-16). This imagery is especially prevalent in the Hymns of the Church. By the “tree” in the Garden, Satan set a trap for Adam and caused him to fall. By the “tree” of the Cross, God also set a trap for Satan, where John of Damascus referred²³⁸ to Christ’s death on the Cross as a baited hook for our common enemy. Satan put Christ to death (1 Corinthians 2:7-8) in his attempt to take over the Kingdom of God on earth (Matthew 21:38-39), and was transfigured on the hook of Divinity. As a result, had Satan known what was happening, he would not have crucified the Lord.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin, for He committed no sin. He Who took away the sin of the world had no deceit in His mouth (Isaiah 53:9). He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin. He died, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He made Himself an offering to the Father for our sakes. We had sinned against Him, and it was proper that He should receive the ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation. The blood of the Lord was not offered to the tyrant. As death approached, Satan swallowed up the body as bait, and was transfigured on the hook of divinity. After tasting of a sinless and life-giving body, he perishes, and brings up again all whom of old he swallowed up. Just as

²³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Chapter 3, v. 13.

²³⁸ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, III, 27.

darkness disappears on the introduction of light, so is death repulsed before the assault of life, and brings life to all, but death to the destroyer”.

The Prophetic Announcement of the Cross: Isaiah 53:10-12

Yet the Lord was willing to crush Him; and He made Him suffer. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, And the will of the Lord shall triumph in His hand. Out of the suffering of His soul, He will see light and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant will make many righteous, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for their transgressions” (Isaiah 53:10-12 Dead Sea Scrolls).

John Chrysostom described²³⁹ in detail how the prophets knew about the Cross and the reason it was necessary.

“David foretold the voice which Christ was to utter on the cross saying, ‘My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?’ (Psalm 22:1) He also describes the burial, ‘They laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places, and in the shadow of death’ (Psalm 88:5). And the resurrection, ‘You shall not leave my soul in hell, neither shall You allow Your Holy One to see corruption’ (Psalm 16:10). And the ascension, ‘God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet’ (Psalm 47:5). And the session on the right hand, ‘The Lord said to My Lord: sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Psalm 110:1).

“But Isaiah also declares the cause; saying, ‘for the transgressions of my people is He brought to death’ (Isaiah 53:12), and because all have strayed like sheep, therefore is he sacrificed (Isaiah 53:6). Then also he adds mention of the result, saying ‘by his stripes we have all been healed’ (Isaiah 53:5), and ‘he has borne the sins of many’ (Isaiah 53:12). The prophets then knew the cross, the cause of the cross, that which was affected by it, and the burial, the resurrection, the ascension, the betrayal, and the trial, and described them all with accuracy”.

Chrysostom also noted²⁴⁰ that the events of the Crucifixion turned out exactly according to the prophetic announcement, in spite of the efforts of His enemies.

“The Jews crucified Jesus with a different intent than what happened. They crucified Him with thieves, in this unintentionally fulfilling prophecy; for what they did for insult contributed to the truth. From this you may learn how great is His power, since the Prophet had foretold of old, that ‘He was numbered with the transgressors’ (Isaiah 53:12). The devil therefore wished to cast a veil over what was done, but was unable; for the three were crucified, but Jesus alone was glorious, that you may learn, that His power affected all. Yet the miracles took place when the three had been nailed to the cross; but no one attributed anything of what was done to either of those others, but to Jesus only. So entirely was the plot of the devil rendered vain, that all returned upon his own head”.

²³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homily Against Marcionists and Manichaeans, 1-2.

²⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

John Chrysostom continued²⁴¹ to say that the effects of Christ's Passion were in fact magnified by the efforts of His enemies to suppress it.

“Truly it is great and unspeakable that Christ became a servant. That He underwent death is far greater. But there is something still greater and stranger. All deaths are not alike; His death seemed to be the most ignominious of all, to be full of shame, to be accursed. For it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). For this cause the Jews eagerly desired to slay Him in this manner, to make Him a reproach, that if no one fell away from Him by reason of His death, yet they might from the manner of His death. For this cause two robbers were crucified with Him, and He in the midst, that He might share their ill repute, and that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’ (Isaiah 53:12). Yet the truth shines forth so much the more and becomes bright; for when His enemies plot such things against His glory, and it yet shines forth, so much the greater does the matter seem. Not by slaying Him, but by slaying Him in such a manner did they think to prove Him more abominable than all men, but they availed nothing. And both the robbers also were such impious ones, for even when on the cross, they reviled Him. Neither the consciousness of their own sins, nor their present punishment, nor their suffering the same things themselves restrained their madness. Finally the one spoke to the other, and silenced him by saying, ‘Do you not fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation?’ (Luke 23:40) So great was their wickedness! Because of this it is written, ‘God has highly exalted Him, and given Him the Name which is above every name’”.

The Barren Woman – the Church: Isaiah 54:1

“Rejoice, you barren that bear not; break forth and cry, you that do not travail. For more are the children of the desolate than of her that has a husband” (Isaiah 54:1).

Ambrose wrote²⁴² concerning the widow of Zarephath, who Elijah visited and sustained during the famine (1 Kings 17:8-16), saying that she represents the Church, and the three years represent the time of Christ's public ministry. Similarly, the barren woman that Isaiah refers to also represents the Church, and her many children represent the many nations that have turned to the Lord over the centuries.

“What is the meaning of the fact that when there was a very great famine in all the land, yet the care of God was not lacking to the widow²⁴³, and the prophet was sent to sustain her? In this story the Lord bids my ears attend to a mystery. What can be truer than the mystery of Christ and the Church? Not without a purpose is one preferred among many widows. Who is such a one, to whom so great a prophet, who was carried up into heaven, should be guided, especially at that time when the heaven was shut for three years and six months, when there was a great famine in the whole land? The famine was everywhere, and yet notwithstanding this widow did not lack. What are these three years? Are they not those in which the Lord came to the earth and could not find fruit on the

²⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philipians, VII.

²⁴² Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Widows, III, 14-15.

²⁴³ See also Luke 4:24-26, where the Lord used this illustration in the contrary sense against the people of Nazareth.

fig-tree, according to that which is written, ‘Behold, there are three years that I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none’” (Luke 13:6-9).

“This is assuredly that widow of whom it was said, ‘Rejoice, you barren that bear not; break forth and cry, you that do not travail. For more are the children of the desolate than of her that has a husband’ (Isaiah 54:1). And well is she a widow of whom it is well said, ‘You shall not remember your shame and your widowhood, for I am the Lord, Who made you’ (Isaiah 54:4 LXX). Perchance she is a widow who has lost her Husband in the suffering of His body, but in the day of judgment she shall receive again the Son of Man, Whom she seemed to have lost. ‘For a short time have I forsaken you’ (Isaiah 54:7 LXX), He says, in order that, being forsaken, she may the more gloriously keep her faith”.

Epistle: Hebrews 2:11-18 "Christ Calls Us Brethren"

The Father in Christ

This Epistle lesson is also used for the Feast Day of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary by Gabriel that she would bear the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38). Both the Annunciation and the Suffering of Christ on the Cross deal with His humanity. One of the heresies commonly bantered about in the 1st Century by Simon Magus²⁴⁴ stated that Christ was not a man, and that He only appeared to die on the Cross. The New Testament writers countered Simon’s teaching by repeatedly mentioning and emphasizing aspects of Christ’s humanity.

The Epistle lesson begins, “It was fitting for Him, for Whom are all things and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10). The one “for Whom are all things” is the Father and “the Captain of our salvation” is His Son. The suffering referred to is the Son’s humanity, since He can’t suffer in His Deity.

John Chrysostom said²⁴⁵ that Christ was glorified in His humanity for what He did at the Cross.

“He (the Father) has done what is worthy of His love toward mankind, in showing His Firstborn to be more glorious than all and in setting Him forth as an example to the others, like some noble wrestler that surpasses the rest. Do you see that to suffer affliction is not the portion of those who are utterly forsaken? Truly His taking flesh to suffer what He did suffer is a far greater thing than making the world and bringing it out of nothing. The Creation is also a token of His loving kindness, but the Cross far more. Paul himself also pointed out this very thing, saying: ‘That in the ages to come He might show forth the exceeding riches of His Grace, He both raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6-7). Suffering not only profits us, but we ourselves also become more glorious and perfect. This too he says in reference to the faithful, comforting them by the way Christ was glorified when He suffered. But do not suppose that there was an accession of glory to Him; for

²⁴⁴ See Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

²⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 4.

that which is of nature (i.e. His Deity) He always had, and received nothing in addition”.

The Epistle continues to address the humanity of Christ, especially in relation to us by stating that, “He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying:

‘I will declare Your Name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly, I will sing praise to You’ (Psalm 22:22)

And again:

‘I will put My trust in Him’ (Isaiah 8:17)

And again:

‘Here am I and the children whom God has given Me’ (Isaiah 8:18).

The context from Psalm 22 quoted above was a prophecy of Christ dying on the Cross: “Dogs have surrounded Me; a band of evildoers has encompassed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. They look, they stare at Me; they divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:16-18, Matthew 27:35).

The second quote, ‘I will put My trust in Him’, is taken verbatim from the Septuagint and was a prophecy regarding the nation of Israel being led into captivity by Assyria (Isaiah 8:7). As quoted by Hebrews, however, it was addressed to the Lord’s disciples living in apostate Israel. The complete text from Isaiah is, “Behold I and the children which God has given me: and they shall be for signs and wonders in the house of Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion” (Isaiah 8:18 LXX).

While the text from Isaiah appears to be addressing Isaiah as a “father” to these disciples, Paul quotes this as referring to Christ as a father figure to these disciples. Thus Christ appears both as a brother (Hebrews 2:11, 12) and as a father. In this father-like role, we note His response to Philip. Philip had requested, “Lord show us the Father and it is sufficient for us” (John 14:8). Jesus responded, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority but the Father who dwells in Me does the works” (John 14:9-10).

Humanity Conquers Death

There were some heretics in the First Century, such as Simon Magus²⁴⁶ and his followers, who claimed that Christ came in appearance only and not in the flesh, not in reality. They were understandably impressed with the Deity of Christ and assumed He wouldn’t stoop to take on the suffering and filth of His Own Creation. Paul addresses this, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death; that is the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Chrysostom stated²⁴⁷ that Christ “partaking of flesh and blood” refers to the Incarnation. Chrysostom continues²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ See Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

²⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 5.

²⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 6.

“Here he points out the wonder that by what the devil prevailed at, by that was he overcome; and the very thing which was his strong weapon against the world (namely death), by this Christ smote him. In this He exhibits the greatness of the conqueror’s power. Do you see how great a good death has wrought?”

“Why do you fear him that has been brought to nothing? He is no longer terrible, but has been trodden under foot, has been utterly despised (see 2 Timothy 1:10); he is vile and of no account.”

Chrysostom then made²⁴⁹ an analogy: Life prior to Christ he compared to being held captive in prison awaiting execution, but being fed with choice food all the while. But now, the choice food and the death sentence have been removed and in its place is a contest involving combat that leads not to death but to a kingdom. “Of which group would you wish to be in: Those fed well in prison awaiting execution, or those who contend much and labor willingly that they may crown themselves with the diadem of the kingdom? Not only has death been terminated, but he who is ever showing that war without truce against us (i.e. the devil) has been brought to nothing, since he that doesn’t fear death, is out of reach of the devil’s tyranny”.

Man and Angels in the Age to Come

After going into a lot of reasons why we should not neglect so great a salvation, Paul then goes into some reasons why we should be motivated to pay close attention. “For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels” (Hebrews 2:5). Following this statement, he again quotes word for word from the Septuagint:

“What is man that You are mindful of him, or the Son of Man that You take care of him? You have made Him a little lower than the angels; you have crowned Him with glory and honor, and set Him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under His feet” (Psalm 8:4-6 LXX).

From the context of Psalm 8, this would seem to be speaking of men in general. For example, Psalm 8:7 lists some of the “all things in subjection”: sheep, oxen, birds and fish. Yet Paul uses this quote from Psalm 8 to refer to Christ. He calls the man Jesus Christ the Captain of our salvation, Who is in the process of bringing many sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

So then, Psalm 8 **does** refer to men in general, but specifically those men who are related by the second birth to their Older Brother. He is the Firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29) and He is not ashamed to call us His brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

Paul then brought in a little reality check: “But now we do not yet see all things put under Him” (Hebrews 2:8). Instead we see Christ, made (in His flesh) a little lower than the angels and suffering death that He might taste death for everyone. As a result He was crowned with glory and honor in His humanity (Hebrews 2:9) and sits at the Right Hand of God (Hebrews 10:12, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69). When He returns, God the Father will put all things in subjection under Him and leave nothing that is not put under Him (Hebrews 2:8). It was the Father’s plan that all things are for Christ and all things are by Christ (Hebrews 2:10). And as He has been exalted and glorified, so shall we be when He returns. Thus, just as Christ was made a little lower than the angels in His humanity, so we are now. But by being united with

²⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 6.

Him in the Body of Christ, just as He was exalted to His previous glory, which He had prior to the Incarnation, so shall we be as He “brings many sons to glory”.

This does not necessarily imply that we will rule angels as He does. The Lord said that, in the Resurrection, we will be equal to angels (Luke 20:36). We will judge angels, i.e. those that had fallen (1 Corinthians 6:3), as the Twelve will judge the Twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). But the angels refer to themselves as our fellow servants (Revelation 19:10, 22:9), and they are referred to as “sons of God” also (compare Genesis 6:2, 4; Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; Luke 20:36; Romans 8:14). “Equal to angels” however, does not imply being identical to angels, since they are non-physical beings.

Paul mentioned angels again. “For indeed, He does not latch onto (or grasp) angels, but He does latch onto (or grasp) the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16). Chrysostom stated, “He did not take on an angel’s nature, but a man’s. He did not grasp that nature which belongs to angels, but ours. This expression “grasp”, or “latch onto” (Greek *epilambano*) is derived from the figure of persons pursuing those who turn away from them, and doing everything to overtake them as they flee, and to take hold of them as they are bounding away. When human nature was fleeing from Him, and fleeing far away (Ephesians 2:13), He pursued after and overtook us. It is a great and wonderful thing, and full of amazement, that our flesh should sit on high and be adored by angels and archangels, by Cherubim and Seraphim. God has great zeal on behalf of our nature.”

“Moreover, he did not say simply ‘of men He latches onto’ but of the ‘seed of Abraham’ (Hebrews 2:16) thus showing that their race is great and honorable. Therefore in all things, he had to be made like His brethren’ (Hebrews 2:17). This goes both ways also. Just as He was made like us in the Incarnation, so we will be made like Him in the Resurrection. He did not lose His Deity in taking on humanity; just so, we will not lose our humanity when we take on immortality. But “the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43, Daniel 12:3). Moses and Elijah have already seen this in the Transfiguration; we will join them at the Resurrection. This is a great salvation that is foolish to neglect by drifting away. Instead, it is something worth paying attention to every minute of every day. As Chrysostom said²⁵⁰, “If He who is worshipped by angels, for our sake endured a little less than the angels, much more ought we, who are inferior to angels, to bear everything for His sake”.

²⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 3.

Good Friday Ninth Hour Prayers *The Death of Christ*

Good Friday Ninth Hour Gospel: John 19:23-37 "The Death of Christ"
8th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: Luke 23:32-49 "The Death of Christ"

There are many aspects of the death of Christ that sometimes go unnoticed. There is His concern about His mother, the other women at the foot of the Cross, and the very few words that He uttered while hanging on the Cross for six hours. All of this has a great deal of significance.

The Apostle John Assigned the Care of the Virgin Mary: John 19:25-27

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister (i.e. sister-in-law), Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home (John 19:25-27).

Assigning the care of His mother to the Apostle John was necessary in 1st Century Jewish culture. The oldest son in the family had the “birthright” and was expected to care for his mother for the rest of her life in the event of his father’s death. He was given an extra share of the birthright to do this with. Out of this extra share, he was also expected to provide for any unmarried sisters, including their dowry upon marriage (Deuteronomy 21:15-17).

In Jesus’ case, there were no other natural brothers or sisters, but there were stepbrothers, stepsisters and cousins. John, son of Zebedee, Jesus’ cousin, and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20) was chosen to care for His mother. John’s mother, Salome, one of the myrrh-bearing women (Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40, 16:1) was also Jesus’ stepsister (and the Virgin Mary’s stepdaughter) and was a very close confidante of the Virgin Mary. It was quite natural for the Lord to entrust the care of His mother to John at the cross (John 19:25-27) since Mary and Salome were so close. Therefore the Virgin Mary lived in John’s house along with John’s mother, Salome, until her death. This implies that Salome’s husband, Zebedee, died shortly after Pentecost.

Theophylact noted²⁵¹ how close the women were who were at the Cross and at the Tomb. There were others of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, but some were more prominent and bolder than the others.

““There were also women’, the evangelist says, ‘among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph’. This Mary was the Theotokos, the Mother of God, who, because she had been betrothed to Joseph, was called the ‘mother’ of James and Joseph, who were among Joseph’s children by his first marriage. She was called ‘mother’, meaning ‘stepmother’, just as she was called Joseph’s ‘wife’, instead of, more precisely, his ‘betrothed’. Salome was the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John. There were many other

²⁵¹ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Mark, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1993, Chapter 15, p. 137.

women disciples present, but Mark mentions by name only the most prominent of them”.

John was very prominent in the early Church. This was very noticeable to Paul when he came to Jerusalem in c. 48 AD for the Council in Jerusalem regarding the issue of circumcision of the Gentiles (Acts 15). At that time, Paul perceived that James, Peter and John were the pillars of the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 2:9). This was James the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19), Bishop of Jerusalem²⁵² until c. 62 AD, and not John’s brother James. John’s brother had already been martyred in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-3). James was the stepson of the Virgin Mary along with Joseph (Matthew 13:55), and Mary was known as their “mother” for all the love she showed for them (Matthew 27:56). Joseph (also called Barsabas, Judah and Justus) was very prominent in the Early Church as one of the leading men (Acts 15:22), and a prophet (Acts 15:32). He had been put forward along with Matthias as a candidate to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:23-26).

According to tradition²⁵³, the Zebedee family owned property in Jerusalem, which included a small plot in the Garden of Gethsemane, and John had his own home (John 19:27), which was located on Mt. Zion. It was probably due to this family familiarity that John was known to the high priest, Caiaphas, during Jesus’ trial, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Caiaphas may also have known John because of his family wealth. We note that John went out during Jesus’ trial and spoke to the doorkeeper to let Peter in (John 18:13-16). Unlike Peter, John was spared the inquisition that Peter received in the courtyard (John 18:17-27), because the people in the courtyard knew John.

In about 44 AD, Herod (i.e. Agrippa) began to persecute the Church, killing James, John’s brother, with the sword (Acts 12:1). James, like John, had been very eloquent in proclaiming the Resurrection of Christ following his return from Spain. Herod also arrested Peter since he saw it pleased the Jews; but an angel let Peter out of prison at night (Acts 12:3, 7). Peter stopped by at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where everyone was praying for him. There he told them he was okay; but that he was leaving town, and they should be sure to tell James, the Bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). From there Peter made his way first to Caesarea and eventually to Antioch. Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch c. 46 AD while Peter was still there (Galatians 2:11-15, Acts 11:25-26).

After Peter’s escape, John and the Virgin Mary left Jerusalem due to Herod’s persecution. Since John’s lot in the evangelization of the world was Asia Minor, they sailed for Ephesus. There they stayed until the death of Herod (Acts 12:20-23). To put this in context, the Apostle Andrew had already been to Ephesus briefly, but the Apostle Paul would not arrive until 52 AD, at the end of his Second Missionary Journey. Since Herod died not too long after he killed James, John and the Virgin Mary most likely stayed in Ephesus less than two years. As was her custom, the Virgin Mary spent her time in prayer, fasting and meditation on the Scriptures.

²⁵² We can see the role of James as Bishop at the Council of Jerusalem that dealt with the issue of circumcision of the Gentiles. After everyone had their say, James pronounced the judgment, saying, “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God: (Acts 15:19).

²⁵³ Holy Apostles Convent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, Buena Vista, Colo. 81211, p. 417.

John and Mary returned to Jerusalem following the death of Herod, and remained there until the early 50's. About that time, Mary received an invitation from Lazarus²⁵⁴, the brother of Mary and Martha, to visit him on Cyprus. Lazarus had been ordained Bishop of Cyprus by the Apostle Barnabas, but did not dare enter Jerusalem for fear of the Jews. It had been over 20 years since the Jewish leaders had tried to kill him; but they still sought to do so (John 12:9-11).

Bishop Lazarus sent a ship for her so that she might visit him on Cyprus. Out at sea, however, they encountered a violent storm that took them far off course and up to the northern part of the Aegean Sea near Macedonia. There, they put in to the port of Clemes on Athos at the tip of the 50-mile long peninsula. At this location today, there are a number of famous monasteries that trace their origin to the visit of John and the Virgin Mary in the early 50's, and most of the information we have concerning the Virgin Mary's voyage comes from these monasteries.

At that time, the population of Athos consisted of young virgins dedicated to the goddess Diana who were expected to become priestesses to serve in the Greek temples. While John and Mary were there, many miraculous events occurred and all the residents of Athos accepted the Christian Faith. Before leaving, they appointed a leader and teacher for the newly illumined residents of Athos from among their traveling party. In addition, Mary prayed for the blessing of Athos, that the Lord would have mercy on it and keep it free from harm until the end of the world along with its inhabitants. Continuing on to Cyprus, John and Mary stayed there for a while, and Mary blessed the Christians there and returned to Jerusalem with John and the others.

Shortly after Mary and John returned from Cyprus, Mary Magdalene also returned to Jerusalem from her evangelism in Rome and elsewhere. Since she had been very close to the Virgin Mary during Jesus' three-year ministry, she stayed with the Apostle John for several years until the Virgin Mary's death. At this time, the Virgin Mary was in her early 70's and Mary Magdalene was in her late 60's. Mary finally passed away in c. 55 AD, and the Twelve Apostles gathered together from around the world for her funeral. Many miraculous events occurred during her funeral, and she was buried in the family plot in the Garden of Gethsemane²⁵⁵.

John Chrysostom stated²⁵⁶ that it was a great honor for the Apostle John to be assigned the care of Jesus' mother. Yet John, in modesty, did not boast about this honor.

“He on the Cross, commits His mother to the disciple, teaching us even to our last breath to show every care for our parents. When indeed she unseasonably troubled Him, He said, ‘Woman, what have I to do with you?’ (John 2:4) And, ‘Who is My mother?’ (Matthew 12:48). But here He shows much loving affection, and commits her to the disciple whom He loved. Again John conceals himself, in modesty; for had he desired to boast, he would have also put in the cause for which he was loved, since probably it was some great and wonderful one”.

²⁵⁴ The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO 81211, p. 432.

²⁵⁵ For more details of the life of the Virgin Mary, see Mark Kern, The Life of the Virgin Mary, Unpublished Work, 2002, pp. 67-70

²⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 2-3.

Christ, having committed His mother to John, said, ‘Behold your Son’ (John 19:26). O the honor! With what honor did He honor the disciple! When He Himself was now departing, He committed her to the disciple to take care of. Since it was likely that, being His mother, she would grieve, and require protection, He with reason entrusted her to the beloved. To him He said, ‘Behold your mother’ (John 19:27). This He said, knitting them together in love; which the disciple, understanding, took her to his own home. Why did John make no mention of any other woman, although another stood there? To teach us to pay more than ordinary respect to our mothers! When parents oppose us on spiritual matters, we must not obey them, so when they do not hinder us, we ought to pay them all becoming respect, and to prefer them before others.

Mary, the Wife of Clopas

Also mentioned at the foot of the Cross was Mary, the Wife of Clopas, or Cleopas (Luke 24:18). Cleopas is the Hebrew name for Alphaeus, the father of two of the Twelve Apostles, James and Matthew. This Mary’s husband was the brother of Joseph, the Virgin Mary’s betrothed; thus she was the Virgin Mary’s sister-in-law (John 19:25). Since Joseph died at the age of 110 just before Jesus’ public ministry²⁵⁷, Cleopas was probably also quite old when the risen Lord appeared to him and Luke on the road to Emmaeus (Luke 24:13-18).

In the first year after Pentecost, the Church had conflicts with the Jewish leaders as recorded in Acts, but no major persecution occurred. One year after Pentecost, this peace ended with the stoning of Stephen, and the murder of 200 others²⁵⁸ by the Jewish leaders. This caused the Church to scatter in an effort to escape the bloodbath, but they went preaching the Word as they left Jerusalem (Acts 8:4). Since there is no mention of Alphaeus (Cleopas) in any of the literature following Pentecost, whereas he was prominent before that time (Luke 24:18), it is probable that he either died during that first year, or was killed during the bloodbath accompanying the death of Stephen.

As the Church was scattered, most of the Twelve also left Jerusalem on their respective missionary journeys. Spanish tradition indicates that Mary, the wife of Cleopas, accompanied James, the son of Zebedee (her niece Salome’s son) to help with the missionary work in Spain. She was buried with great honor at Compostela in Spain after she died²⁵⁹. James, the son of Zebedee, returned to Jerusalem in 44 AD and was martyred by Herod to please the Jews (Acts 12:1-3). Some accounts state that James’ body was returned to Spain for burial with great honor²⁶⁰.

During Jesus’ public ministry, Mary, the wife of Clopas was one of the eight “Myrrh-Bearing women” who financed His public ministry (Luke 8:3) and who were present at the Cross and at the tomb.

²⁵⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 31.

²⁵⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

²⁵⁹ See the Spanish references cited in Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, July 25, p. 183.

²⁶⁰ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 30.

Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, July 25, p. 183.

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was also mentioned as being present at the foot of the Cross. She came from the town of Magdala on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was known for its industry in the pickling of sardines. Mary Magdalene was probably the wealthiest of the eight “Myrrh-Bearing women” since her name was mentioned first among those who supported Jesus’ public ministry (Luke 8:3). These eight women had been together a lot during Jesus’ three-year public ministry. These same women had faithfully followed Him from Galilee and had come up with Him to Jerusalem (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40-41 and Luke 23:55). The eight are:

- Mary Magdalene
- Mary Theotokos (The Virgin Mary)
- Joanna
- Salome
- Mary the wife of Cleopas (or Alphaeus)
- Susanna
- Mary of Bethany
- Martha of Bethany

Two years earlier in 28 AD, the Myrrh-Bearing women had been traveling with Jesus as “He went through every city and village preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). In this case, the women are credited with contributing to the support of the ministry from their possessions, where Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna were mentioned as the most prominent (Luke 8:1-3). This probably means that Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna were the wealthiest and contributed the most financially. Since Joanna was the wife of Herod’s steward, she was probably well off financially.

Christ’s Words on the Cross

7th Gospel for Holy Thursday Evening: Matthew 27:46-54

It is remarkable how little the Lord spoke while He was nailed to the Cross. For the six hours that He was hanging there, ridiculed and taunted, there are only a few things He said. First He responded to the Repentant Thief (Luke 23:43). Second, He committed the care of His mother to the Apostle John (John 19:26-27). Besides this, He is recorded as saying nothing else until a few minutes before His death.

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (John 19:28-30).

From Mark’s account, “Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’, which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ Some of those who stood by, when they heard *that*, said, ‘Look, He is calling for Elijah!’ Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put *it* on a reed, and offered *it* to Him to drink, saying, ‘Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down’. And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last” (Mark 15:33-37).

From Luke's account, "Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. When Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit'. Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:44-46).

The sequence of His words at His death would seem to be

1. "I thirst!" (John 19:28)
2. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" (Mark 15:34)
3. "It is finished!" (John 19:30)
4. "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Christ Said, "I Thirst!"

1st Century heretics were impressed with all of Jesus' miracles and generally didn't doubt that He was God. But they claimed that He wasn't a man like us. Christ's words on the Cross tell how truly human He was.

The words "I thirst" illustrate Christ's humanity. Consider the events leading up to His statement that He was thirsty! He had been taken captive after midnight in the Garden of Gethsemane, and given a mockery of a "trial" during the night by the Sanhedrin. At daybreak, He was shouted down as an insurrectionist during His "trial" before Pilate and Herod; He was given a very severe beating early in the morning; and He was crucified about 9 AM. From the beating and the resultant loss of blood, He was already in shock. After hanging on the Cross for six hours, with no food or drink since the Passover meal the night before, He finally said that He was thirsty, going into secondary shock from the loss of blood. His statement on the Cross illustrates His humanity and anticipates the heresies spread by Simon Magus²⁶¹ and others a few years later, which denied His humanity. Simon's heresies are not just lies, but they are very obvious lies!

Athanasius of Alexandria, in combating the heretics of his day, spoke²⁶² at length about the implications of Jesus expressing human weakness, such as thirst, while hanging on the Cross. The heretics were saying either that He wasn't really a man, or that He just appeared to have a human body. If either case were true, we are still dead in our sins since Christ could not die for us as one of us.

"In the Old Testament, He came to the Saints individually, and to make those holy who rightly received Him; but neither was it said that He had become man, nor, when they suffered, was it said that He Himself suffered. But when He came among us from Mary once at the end of the ages for the abolition of sin, then He took flesh and became man. In that flesh He suffered for us, as Peter says, 'Christ therefore having suffered for us in the flesh' (1 Peter 4:1). Whereas He was always God, and hallowed those to whom He came, afterwards for our sakes He became man, and 'bodily', as the Apostle says, 'The Godhead dwelt in the flesh' (Colossians 2:9). That is to say, 'Being God, He had His own body, and using this as an instrument, He became man for our sakes'. And on account of this, the properties of the flesh are said to be His, since He was in it, such as to hunger, to thirst, to suffer, to be weary, and the like, of which the flesh is capable. On the other hand the works proper to the Word Himself, such as to raise the

²⁶¹ See Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

²⁶² Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxvi, 31, 32, 34.

dead, to restore sight to the blind, and to cure the woman with an issue of blood, He did through His own body. The Word bore the infirmities of the flesh, as His own, for His was the flesh; and the flesh ministered to the works of the Godhead, because the Godhead was in it, for the body was God's. Isaiah said that He 'carried our infirmities' (Isaiah 53:4); he has not said, 'He remedied our infirmities', lest, as being external to the body, and only healing it, as He has always done, He should leave men still subject to death. But He carries our infirmities, and He Himself bears our sins, that it might be shown that He has become man for us, and that the body which in Him bore them, was His own body. While He received no hurt Himself by 'bearing our sins in His body on the tree' (1 Peter 2:24), we men were redeemed from our own affections, and were filled with the righteousness of the Word".

"When the flesh suffered, the Word was not external to it; and therefore the passion was His. And when He did His Father's works in a Divine manner, His flesh was not external to Him, but in the body itself did the Lord do them. Hence He said, 'If I do not the works of the Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you don't believe Me, believe the works, that you may know that the Father is in Me and I in Him' (John 10:37-38). And thus when there was need to raise Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick of a fever, He stretched forth His hand humanly, but He stopped the illness divinely. In the case of the man blind from birth, human was the spit, but divinely did He open the eyes through the clay. In the case of Lazarus, He spoke with a human voice as man; but divinely, as God, did He raise Lazarus from the dead. These things were so done, because He had a body, not in appearance, but in truth. When the Lord put on human flesh, He put it on whole with the affections proper to it. Just as we say that the body was His own, so also we may say that the affections of the body were proper to Him alone, though they did not touch Him according to His Godhead. If then the body had been another's, to this other should the affections be attributed; but if the flesh is the Word's, for 'the Word became flesh' (John 1:14), of necessity then the affections also of the flesh are ascribed to Him. To whom the affections are ascribed, such as to be condemned, to be scourged, to thirst, and the cross, and death, and the other infirmities of the body, of Him too is the triumph and the grace. For this cause then, consistently and fittingly such affections are ascribed not to another, but to the Lord. Grace also is from Him, and that we may become, not worshippers of any other, but truly devout towards God. We invoke no originate thing, no ordinary man, but the natural and true Son from God, who has become man".

"He is said to hunger, to thirst, to work, not to know, to sleep, to weep, to ask, to flee, to be born and to pray for deliverance from the cup. That is, He underwent all that belongs to the flesh, in each case Christ then hungered and thirsted for us in the flesh. At times He said He did not know (Matthew 24:36), and was punched with the fist (Matthew 26:67), and worked for us in the flesh (Matthew 14:19-21). He was 'exalted' (John 12:23) too, and born (Luke 2:7), and grew 'in the flesh' (Luke 2:52). He 'feared and hid' (John 8:59) in the flesh; and said, 'If it be possible let this cup pass from Me' (Matthew 26:39). For on this account has the Apostle himself said, 'Christ then having suffered' (1 Peter 4:1), not in His Godhead, but 'for us in the flesh,' that these affections may be

acknowledged as, not proper to the Word by nature, but proper by nature to the flesh”.

Athanasius went on to say²⁶³ that many other very human actions done by Christ serve to illustrate that He is a man just like us.

“Wherefore also the Word Himself, being made man for our sakes, condescended to hide Himself when He was sought after, as we do; and also when He was persecuted, to flee and avoid His enemies. Just as He showed that by hungering, thirsting and suffering, so also by hiding Himself and fleeing, He showed that He had taken our flesh, and was made man. Thus at the very first, as soon as He became man, when He was a little child, He Himself by His Angel commanded Joseph, ‘Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and flee into Egypt; for Herod will seek the young Child’s life’ (Matthew 2:13). When Herod was dead, we find Him withdrawing to Nazareth because of Archelaus his son (Matthew 2:22-23). When He was showing Himself to be God, and made whole the withered hand, the Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew Himself from there (Matthew 12:15). When He raised Lazarus from the dead, from that day on, says the Scripture, ‘They took counsel to put Him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went into the country near to the wilderness’ (John 11:53-54). Again, when our Savior said, ‘Before Abraham was, I AM’, ‘Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by’” (John 8:58-59, Luke 4:30).

How Was Christ Forsaken By the Father?

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’, which is translated, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Mark 15:34). If Jesus is God and equal to the Father, how could the Father forsake him? Some heretics have used this statement to “prove” that Jesus isn’t God.

Jesus was quoting from the Psalms that describe the ordeal He was going through. For example, Psalm 22 describes not just His cry to the Father, but also the ordeal and the rigors of crucifixion on a human body. Consider some excerpts from this Psalm:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? *Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?* O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You *are* holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22:1-3).

“I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look *and* stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:14-19).

²⁶³ Athanasius of Alexandria, Defense of His Flight, XII.

As Jesus said this, His enemies knew the Scriptures that He was quoting, but they chose to ignore and misinterpret His words. This was easy to do because of the similar phonetic sound of His words (*Eloi*, meaning “My God!” versus *Elia* meaning “Elijah”). While Jesus was tipping them off regarding what was going on, they chose to ignore Him and to continue the mockery.

“Some of those who stood by, when they heard *that*, said, ‘Look, He is calling for Elijah!’ Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put *it* on a reed, and offered *it* to Him to drink, saying, ‘Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down’ (Mark 15:35-36).

Gregory of Nazianzen, addressing heretics of his day, stated²⁶⁴ that the point here is that the Son, in His humanity, subjected everything to God the Father. Arguments that say that the Father abandoned Him have their origin in the heresies of Simon Magus²⁶⁵, who taught that there were competing deities that created and ruled the world. According to these heresies, the Son was afraid of the Passion, and the Father withdrew Himself from Him in His Sufferings during the Crucifixion. Gregory taught that Christ subjected Himself to the Father in His humanity and was, in His own person, called a curse in order to destroy my curse. He represented us when, in fact, we were the ones that were forsaken by God.

“Take, in the next place, the subjection of the Son to the Father. You are fashioning your argument as if it concerned some robber, or some hostile deity. But look at it in this manner. For my sake He was called a curse (Galatians 3:13), Who destroyed my curse. He was made sin, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He became a new Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) to take the place of the old, just so He makes my disobedience His own as Head of the whole body (Ephesians 1:22-23). As long then as I am disobedient and rebellious, both by denial of God and by my passions, Christ also is called disobedient on my account. But when all things shall be subjected to Him at the Second Coming (Psalm 110:1, 1 Corinthians 15:25), then He Himself will have fulfilled His submission, bringing me, whom He has saved, to God. According to my view, this is the subjection of Christ; namely, the fulfilling of the Father’s Will. As the Son subjects all to the Father, so does the Father to the Son; the Son by His Work, the Father by His good pleasure (Ephesians 1:5, 1 Corinthians 1:21). Thus He Who subjects, presents to God that which he has subjected, making our condition His own. Of the same kind, it appears to me, is the expression, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ It was not He who was forsaken either by the Father, or by His own Godhead, as some have thought, as if He were afraid of the Passion, and therefore withdrew Himself from Him in His Sufferings. Who compelled Him either to be born on earth at all, or to be lifted up on the Cross? But He was in His own Person representing us. We were the forsaken and despised before. Similarly, He makes our folly and our transgressions His own; and says what follows in the Psalm, for it is very evident that this refers to Christ. ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent. But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel’” (Psalm 22:1-3).

²⁶⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, Fourth Theological Oration, V.

²⁶⁵ See Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

Ambrose stated²⁶⁶ that Christ's feeling forsaken on the Cross was evidence that He had a human soul.

“As being man, therefore, He doubts; as man He is amazed. Neither His power nor His Godhead is amazed, but His soul; He is amazed by consequence of having taken human infirmity upon Him. Seeing, then, that He took upon Himself a soul, He also took the affections of a soul, for God could not have been distressed or could not have died in respect of His being God. Finally, He cried, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ As being man, therefore, He speaks, bearing with Him my terrors; for when we are in the midst of dangers we think ourselves abandoned by God. As man, therefore, He is distressed, as man He weeps, as man He is crucified”.

John Chrysostom stated²⁶⁷ that, in spite of all this, Jesus demonstrated that He honored His Father up to His last breath.

“Even after this He spoke, that they might learn that He was still alive, and that He Himself did this. And that they might become by this also gentler, He said, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ Up to His last breath, they saw that He honored His Father, and is no adversary of God. Therefore He also uttered a certain cry from the prophet David (Psalm 22:1), even to His last hour bearing witness to the Old Testament. This is not simply a cry from the prophet, but also in Hebrew, so as to be plainly intelligible to them. By all things, He showed how He is of one mind with Him that begot Him”.

Thus the Father did not forsake Christ on the Cross; the Cross was part of Christ's mission in becoming incarnate. Misinterpretation of Christ's words comes from the mockers at the scene and from later heretics.

Jesus Cries Out and Gives Up His Spirit: John 19:30, Luke 23:46

From John's Gospel account, Jesus had finished His work. “After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’ When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit (John 19:28-30). From the accounts of the other Gospel writers, Jesus spoke His last words with a loud voice. Luke records this as, “And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit’. Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46). It is not clear from the Gospel accounts whether He spoke with a loud voice “It is finished!” or “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit”, but the implication is that it was the former.

John Chrysostom stated²⁶⁸ that Jesus expired of His own will; He didn't just die of exhaustion when His strength ran out, even though He was in secondary shock. Because He died of His own will, He did not need His legs broken, like the two thieves, to bring on death quicker. Jesus died calmly and with power, which was unusual for crucified criminals, who usually died of sheer exhaustion. Instead Jesus shouted with a loud voice, bowed His head and died with His (human) strength still partly intact.

²⁶⁶ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, II, vii, 56.

²⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

²⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 3.

“After this, Jesus knew that all things were now accomplished” (John 19:28). That is, that nothing was lacking to the Dispensation. He desired to show that this Death was of a new kind, and everything was in the power of the Person dying, and He did not die before He willed it. He willed it after He had fulfilled all things. Therefore He said, ‘I have power to lay down My life; and I have power to take it again’ (John 10:18). Knowing therefore that all things were fulfilled, He said, ‘I thirst’.

“Having therefore received it, He said, ‘It is finished’. Do you see how He does all things calmly, and with power? What follows shows this. When all had been completed, ‘He bowed His head, [this had not been nailed] and gave up the spirit’ (John 19:30). That is, ‘died’. Yet to expire does not come after the bowing the head; but here, on the contrary, it does. He did not, when He had expired, bow His head, as happens with us, but when He had bent His head, then He expired. By all things the Evangelist has shown that He was Lord of all”.

Chrysostom continued²⁶⁹, “This cry [It is finished!] tore the veil, and opened the tombs, and made the house desolate. He did this, not as offering insult to the temple. How should He, who said, ‘Do not make my Father’s house a house of merchandise’ (John 2:16, Matthew 21:13), but declaring them to be unworthy of His abiding there; like when He delivered it over to the Babylonians. But not for this only were these things done, but what took place was a prophecy of the coming desolation in c. 70 AD.

Theophylact stated²⁷⁰ that it was the Lord’s voice, which caused the centurion to believe. From the moment that Christ committed His spirit, not to Hades, but to the Father, our souls were freed from Hades.

“When He had cried out with a loud voice, He gave up His breath. He had the power to lay down His life, and to take it back again. It was the Lord's voice itself, together with the other miracles, which caused the centurion to believe. For the Lord did not die as an ordinary man, but as the Master. He named death a committal, that is, a deposit for safekeeping; because He intended to receive back His life. His last words, the first ever spoken by a man completely free of any claim by the devil, made our souls worthy of freedom. In Christ our souls have likewise been committed to the Father and are no longer held by the devil. Before the death of Christ, the devil had a clear right to our souls. But from the moment that the Son committed His spirit, not to Hades, but into the hands of the Father, our souls were freed from Hades. The very thing which the Lord had said, ‘If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Me’ (John 12:32), is now seen to have been accomplished. When the Lord was lifted up on the Cross, He drew both the thief and the centurion to Himself”.

The Love of God and the Cross

One thing that stands out very emphatically in the Gospel account is the absence of justice on the part of the civil and religious authorities. If anyone was ever innocent, it was Christ; He had not only committed no crime (John 19:4, Luke 23:14-15), but also had committed no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22). Yet the religious authorities arranged

²⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

²⁷⁰ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 313.

false witnesses against Him (Matthew 26:59-60), beat Him and spit on Him (Matthew 26:67). The civil authorities mocked Him with a scarlet robe, a crown of thorns, a reed for a scepter and spit on Him (John 19:2-3, Matthew 27:28-31). Pontius Pilate even had Jesus scourged, bloodying His back, even though Pilate's wife had warned him from a vision she had to have nothing to do with Jesus (Matthew 27:19). Yet Pilate refused to stand up for justice even though he found no fault in Jesus (John 19:4) and then delivered Jesus to the mob (John 19:16).

In spite of this injustice, Jesus willingly went to His Cross, knowing that this would happen (Luke 9:22, 18:31-33). He did this because He loved us (Romans 5:8), and this type of love is the greatest kind (John 15:13).

John Chrysostom commented²⁷¹ on the love of God and applied the lessons learned to ourselves and our walk with God:

“But let us not merely read of these things, but bear them in mind: the crown of thorns, the robe, the reed, the punching with the fist, the slapping on the cheek, the spitting and the irony. These things, if continually meditated on, are sufficient to take down all anger. If we are mocked, if we suffer injustice, let us still say, ‘the servant is not greater than his Lord’ (John 13:16). On this account He bore all these things in order that we might walk in His footsteps, and endure this mocking which disturbs more than any other kind of reproach. Yet nevertheless, He not only bore these things, but also used every means to save and deliver from the appointed punishment those who did them. He sent the Apostles also to the Jewish people for their salvation, and you hear them saying, ‘We know that you did it in ignorance’ (Acts 3:17, also 3:25-26). By these means, they drew them to repentance. This let us also imitate.”

“All these things, therefore, let us practice in our actions; for if we do not act rightly in these, we have come to no purpose and in vain into the world. Or rather we have come to our harm, for faith is not sufficient to bring men into the Kingdom. It even has power in this way to condemn those who exhibit a sick life. For ‘that servant who knew His Master’s Will and did not prepare himself or do according to His Will, shall be beaten with many stripes’ (Luke 12:47). Again, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin’ (John 15:22). What excuse then shall we have, who have been set within the palace and deemed worthy to peek and enter into the sanctuary, and have been made partakers of the releasing mysteries?”

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote²⁷² that mankind was the enemy of God through sin. God had to either destroy all men or cancel the sentence. What He did was to preserve the truth of the sentence and also to show His loving-kindness.

“Christ endured these things, ‘and made peace through the Blood of His Cross, for things in heaven, and things in earth’ (Colossians 1:20). We were enemies of God through sin and God had appointed the sinner to die. Therefore one of two things must have happened; either God, in His truth, should destroy all men or in His loving-kindness He should cancel the sentence. But behold the wisdom of God; He preserved both the truth of His sentence, and the exercise of His loving-kindness. Christ took our sins in ‘His body on the tree, that we by His

²⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXIV, 3.

²⁷² Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 33.

death might die to sin, and live to righteousness' (1 Peter 2:24). Of no small account was He who died for us; He was not a literal sheep; He was not a mere man; He was more than an Angel; He was God made man. The transgression of sinners was not as great as the righteousness of Him who died for them. The sin which we committed was not as great as the righteousness which He wrought who laid down His life for us, who laid it down when He pleased, and took it again when He pleased. Do you know that He didn't lay down His life by violence, or yield up the spirit against His will? He cried to the Father, saying, 'Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit' (Luke 23:46); I commend it, that I may take it again. Having said these things, 'He gave up the spirit' (Matthew 27:50); but not for any long time, for He quickly rose again from the dead".

Propitiation for our Sins

Propitiation was what the Old Testament animal sacrifices were all about. The life of the animal was in the blood, and it was the blood that made an atonement or propitiation for the soul (Leviticus 17:11). This was also true in the days of Noah when God told man to begin eating meat, but not blood. He also specified the death penalty for anyone shedding another's blood (Genesis 9:3-6). Blood for a sacrifice was performed as early as Abel's offering (Genesis 4:4), and probably also prior to Abel's birth where the Lord used the skins of the sacrificed animals to make clothing for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21).

This propitiation is graphically illustrated by the Passover in Egypt. When the Lord saw the blood of the Lamb on the doors of the Israelites, He passed over their houses (Exodus 12:13, 23, 29). The Egyptians, who did not have the blood of the lamb for propitiation, died themselves.

In the New Testament, Paul states that Christ was "made like His brethren to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). That is, He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). In His humanity, He was fully human; thus He was able to make propitiation as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19). This propitiation illustrates the love of God for man (1 John 4:10).

The Covenant of Blood

The Covenant relationship between God and His people in the Old Testament has been called "a covenant of blood" (Hebrews 9:20). In consecrating the Tabernacle, both the Tabernacle, the vessels inside, the book of the Law and the people were sprinkled with blood (Hebrews 9:19-21). "And according to the Law, almost all things are purified with blood; and without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

Yet the Tabernacle made by Moses was just a copy of the one in heaven. Christ purified the Heavenly Tabernacle with His own blood (Hebrews 9:23), which was a better sacrifice than that of the animals offered continually. "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many"; and "once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:28, 26). The blood of Christ, then:

- Purchased the Church (Acts 20:28)
- Redeemed us (Ephesians 1:7, Revelation 1:5)
- Brought us near to God (Ephesians 2:13)

- Made peace and reconciled us to God (Colossians 1:20)
- Justified us (Romans 5:9)

There are three that bear witness to this in heaven: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There are also three that bear witness on earth: The Spirit, the water and the blood (1 John 5:7-8). The Spirit bears witness that we are children of God and that we are not under bondage (Romans 8:14-17). Christ came by water and blood, (1 John 5:6) and the water that witnesses to this is a living water (John 4:14, 7:38) and is also called the water of Life (Revelation 22:17). The blood also speaks and bears witness. If the blood of Abel could speak from the ground (Genesis 4:10, Hebrews 11:4), the blood of Christ can speak much better and more effectively (Hebrews 12:24) as a witness to these things.

In this regard, the Lord had said that unless one eats His flesh and drinks His blood, one has no life in him. Doing so brings eternal life and resurrection at the last day (John 6:53-54). The Lord's Supper, then, is a sharing or communion in the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16), and there was a "love feast" accompanying the Lord's Table in the Early Church (Jude 1:12).

1st Century Heretics Denied the Death of Christ

A major heresy that was promoted by Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-25) in the 1st century stated that Jesus did not really die on the Cross but only appeared to. Simon claimed that it was he himself, and not Jesus, who appeared to be crucified. The statements in the Gospels giving the details of the Crucifixion, therefore, served the purpose of contradicting the heresies of Simon. The heretic Marcion (late 2nd Century) and others promoted a teaching similar to that of Simon Magus, and they were opposed very strongly by the Fathers of the Church. For example, the following are the words of Tertullian (early 3rd Century) in opposition to Marcion²⁷³.

"He calls with a loud voice to the Father, 'Into Your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46), that even when dying He might expend His last breath in fulfilling the prophets. 'Having said this, He breathed His last'. Did the spirit give itself up; or did the flesh give up the spirit? But the spirit could not have breathed itself out. That which breathes is one thing; that which is breathed out is another. If the spirit is breathed, another must breathe it. If, however, there had been nothing there but spirit, one would say that the spirit *departed* rather than He *expired*. It is the flesh that breathes out the spirit; it both *breathes* the spirit while it has it, and *breathes it out* when it loses it. Suppose, as Marcion said, that it was not flesh upon the cross, but a phantom of flesh. A phantom is but spirit, and so the spirit breathed itself out, and departed as it did so. So the phantom and the spirit disappeared together, and were nowhere to be seen. If this were so, nothing therefore remained on the cross; nothing hung there, after 'the giving up of the spirit' (John 19:30). There was nothing to beg of Pilate, nothing to take down from the cross, nothing to wrap in the linen, nothing to lay in the new sepulcher. This is not what happened! If Christ was a phantom, He is still there. If Christ had departed, He had taken away the phantom also. The only shift left to the impudence of the heretics, is to admit that what remained there was the phantom of a phantom! But Joseph knew that it was a body and he treated Him with so much piety? This is that same Joseph who had not consented with the Jews in their crime (Luke 23:50-52). He was 'the happy man who walked not in the

²⁷³ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 42.

counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1).

9th Gospel: John 19:25-37 “The Taking Down of Christ from the Cross”

Taking Christ down from the Cross required a team of strong men. Beams for the Cross, ones that were strong enough to support a man’s body, were also very heavy. In order to erect the Cross in a vertical position, the Cross was probably lifted and dropped into a hole about 3 feet deep. Nails to support the body were probably placed between the two wrist bones (the *radius* and the *ulna*). Otherwise, the weight of the body might pull the hand bones apart and cause the body to drop to the ground. To support the weight of a body for several days, which was the normal period of crucifixion, the nails had to be driven deep into the wood beams of the Cross. Lifting the Cross out of the hole and pulling out the long nails required considerable effort. Joseph and Nicodemus, being wealthy men, probably had servants to help them with this.

Jesus died about the time that the darkness ended at the ninth hour (or 3 PM). At the same time, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to break the legs of the two thieves. By 6 PM, which was the beginning of the new day (the 15th of Nisan, a Sabbath Day), the two thieves were dead and Joseph and Nicodemus had taken Jesus down from the Cross for burial. As the Lamb of God, Who was proclaimed by John the Baptist three years earlier (John 1:29, 36), none of Jesus’ bones were broken according to the Law regarding the Passover (Exodus 12:46).

Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus’ body in a clean linen cloth (Matthew 27:59) for transport to the tomb, which was nearby (John 19:42). At the tomb, they wrapped Jesus’ body in strips of linen coated with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, creating a cocoon or mummy casing that held His body. The Scripture accounts of the taking down of Christ’s body from the Cross are as follows. From John’s Gospel:

“Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ‘Not *one* of His bones shall be broken’ (Exodus 12:46, Psalm 34:20). Again another Scripture says, ‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced’ (Zechariah 12:10). After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. There they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby” (John 19:31-42).

From Luke’s Gospel:

“Now behold, *there was* a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. *He was* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus” (Luke 23:50-52).

From Mark’s Gospel:

“Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph” (Mark 15:42-45).

From Matthew’s Gospel:

“Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb” (Matthew 27:57-61).

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁷⁴ that the prophecies of Christ’s Crucifixion were accomplished by the zeal of the Jewish leaders to do the opposite. From this, the mystery of the Eucharistic Feast takes its beginning.

“Do you see how strong a thing truth is? By means of the very things, which are the objects of their zeal, prophecy is fulfilled. The soldiers when they came, broke the legs of the others, but not those of Christ. Yet to gratify the Jews, they pierced His side with a spear, and now insulted the dead body. The things, which these men did from a wicked will, fought on the side of the truth. The deed they dared was a demonstration of the Faith, to those who should afterwards disbelieve; as to Thomas (John 20:24-29), and those like him”.

“With this too a mystery was accomplished for ‘there came forth water and blood’. Not without a purpose, or by chance, did those founts come forth, but because by means of these two together the Church consists. The initiated know it, being by water regenerate, and nourished by the Blood and the Flesh. From here the Mysteries take their beginning; that when you approach that awe-inspiring cup, you may so approach, as drinking from His very side”.

“When John emphasized that his testimony is true, he was saying, ‘I didn’t hear it from others, but was myself present and saw it, and the testimony is true’. He relates an insult done; he relates not anything great and admirable, that you should suspect his narrative; but securing the mouths of heretics, and loudly proclaiming beforehand the Mysteries that should be, and beholding the treasure laid up in them, he is very exact concerning what took place”.

²⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 3.

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote²⁷⁵ that there are several meanings to the blood and water that came out of Jesus' side when He was pierced. There were (1) the signs by Moses, (2) the signs for His accusers, and (3) the signs for the Christians and the martyrs.

“The beginning of signs under Moses was blood and water; and the last of all Jesus' signs was the same. First, Moses changed the river into blood; and Jesus at the last gave forth from His side water with blood. This was perhaps on account of the two speeches, Pilate's, who judged Him, and theirs who cried out against Him. Pilate said, ‘I am innocent’ (Matthew 27:24) and washed his hands in water; they who cried out against Him said, ‘His blood be on us’ (Matthew 27:25). There came therefore these two out of His side; the water, for him who judged Him; but for them that shouted against Him, the blood. Again it is to be understood in another way; the blood for the Jews, and the water for the Christians. On them as plotters came the condemnation from the blood; but to you who now believe, the salvation, which is by water. Nothing has been done without a meaning”.

“Comments from our fathers have given another reason. In the Gospels the power of Baptism is twofold. First, baptism is granted by means of water to the illuminated. Second, baptism is granted to holy martyrs, in persecutions, through their own blood. Therefore out of that saving Side came blood and water, to confirm the grace of the confession made for Christ, whether in baptism, or on occasions of martyrdom”.

Theophylact noted²⁷⁶ that Joseph and Nicodemus performed a very courageous act that they knew would bring down the wrath of the Sanhedrin.

“Although Joseph until now had hidden his faith, now he does a praiseworthy thing. Although he was a member of the council and a rich man, he dares to ask for the body of a man who had been crucified for rebellion and sedition, giving no thought to any danger to himself. Though wealth often gives rise to cowardice, Joseph begs for the body and gives it honorable burial in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where no man had been laid before, so that slanderers could not say that it was a different body that rose”.

Good Friday Ninth Hour Epistle: Hebrews 10:19-31 "The Blood of the Covenant"

In order to understand the Epistle lesson, some introduction about the Tabernacle is helpful. The Epistle speaks of Christ entering once for all into the greater and more perfect Tabernacle not made with hands and not of this creation. There is a mystery associated with this.

The Imagery of the Tabernacle

Christ is described as a liturgist (Greek: *leitourgos*) of the true Tabernacle which the Lord erected, not man (Hebrews 8:2). Comparing this to the Tabernacle erected by Moses, the Levitical priesthood served a copy and shadow of the heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5), and that Moses was instructed to “make all things according to the pattern shown him on the mountain”. (See also Exodus 25:8-9, 25:40, 26:30, Numbers 8:4, Acts 7:44). The Levitical priesthood

²⁷⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIII, 21.

²⁷⁶ Theophylact, *The Explanation of the Gospel According to St. Luke*, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, Chapter 23, p. 310-312.

entered the copy every year (on the Day of Atonement) with the blood of animal sacrifices; so the Lord entered the true Tabernacle once for all with His own blood (Hebrews 9:12-26).

The Tabernacle is referred to as the Tabernacle of the Testimony. The testimony (or witness) refers to objects that the Lord told Moses to put inside the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:16, 21). There were three objects there: a jar of manna (Exodus 16:33-35), the two tables of stone that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 31:18, 32:15-16, Deuteronomy 10:3-5) and Aaron's rod that budded (Numbers 17:1-11). By the time of Solomon's Temple, only the tablets of stone were still in the Ark (1 Kings 8:9). These three objects represented Israel's rejection of God's provisions (the manna), rejection of God's Law (the tablets) and rejection of God's leadership (Aaron's rod which budded at the time of Korah's rebellion). These three objects were a testimony or witness against them just as James, the Lord's brother warns that our riches can become a witness against us when the Lord returns (James 5:1-3). They testify as to whom we serve and obey.

Just before the Lord's return, the sanctuary of the Tabernacle of the Testimony in heaven will be opened and out will come seven angels to dispense the wrath of God on His enemies (Revelation 15:5). The illustration of the heavenly Tabernacle is very similar to the earthly Tabernacle. As the seven angels come out, the Tabernacle will be filled with smoke from the glory of God (Revelation 15:8). This is very similar to events associated with the copy on earth; the copy of the Tabernacle was filled with smoke at the following occasions:

EARTHLY TEMPLE FILLED WITH SMOKE	REFERENCE
In the days of Moses as the Tabernacle was finished	Exodus 40:34-40
In the days of Solomon when the Ark was brought into the Temple	1 Kings 8:10ff, 2 Chronicles 5:11-14
In the days of Isaiah	Isaiah 6:1-4

In Revelation 21:1-3, when the Holy City, New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God, it is referred to as a bride adorned for her husband. A loud voice also proclaims from heaven, "Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men" (Revelation 21:3). Following this, John was shown more detail of "the bride, the Lamb's wife." Included were:

DETAILS OF THE LAMB'S BRIDE	REFERENCE
12 gates which are 12 pearls and are the 12 tribes of Israel	Revelation 21:12-13
12 foundations which are 12 precious stones and are the 12 Apostles	Revelation 21:14
Walls made of jasper (or diamond)	Revelation 21:18
The city constructed of pure gold	Revelation 21:18,21
No temple, because the Lord is its temple	Revelation 21:22

Somehow, the treasure we now have in earthenware vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7) gets refined and put together as this holy city. That way, the glory is God's and not ours for putting it together. As we go about our earthly life, if our tabernacle (2 Corinthians 5:1) is destroyed (meaning we die), we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The play on words in the Greek text between the Tabernacle of God and the tabernacle of our bodies seems to be intentional on the part of Paul. It was the building from God that

Abraham was looking for: the city with solid foundations, whose craftsman and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10).

Entrance to the Holy of Holies Because of Christ: Hebrews 10:19-22

With this as a background, let us pick up the Epistle text piece by piece. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

John Chrysostom stated²⁷⁷ that Christ’s sacrifice of Himself opened the doors of Paradise, and provided access to the Holy of Holies in heaven. There is a great difference between this and the Old Covenant, and faith is required.

“He shows the difference of the High Priest, and of the sacrifices, etc. This difference is great, since those are temporal, but these eternal, those ‘ready to vanish away’ (Hebrews 8:13), these permanent, those powerless, these perfect, those figures, these reality. He said it was ‘not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life’ (Hebrews 7:16), and ‘You are a Priest forever’” (Hebrews 5:6).

“Concerning the Covenant, that is old; but this is new and has remission of sins, while that has nothing of the kind. ‘The Law made nothing perfect’ (Hebrews 7:19). Again, ‘sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a Body You have prepared for Me’ (Hebrews 10:5); that is, sacrifice made with hands, while Christ’s Body is ‘the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands’ (Hebrews 9:11). The Old Covenant “has the blood of goats (Hebrews 9:12); this New Covenant has the blood of the Lord. The Old Covenant has the Priest²⁷⁸ ‘standing’; this New Covenant has the priest ‘sitting’. Since all those are inferior and these greater, therefore he says, ‘Having therefore, brethren, boldness’”.

“Sins produce shame; so having all things forgiven us, being made fellow-heirs, and enjoying so great Love, produces boldness. The entrance into the Holy of Holies means Heaven, and the access to spiritual things. This is ‘a new and living way’ since now the gates of Heaven have been opened, which was not done even for Abraham. The Old Covenant was a way of death, leading to Hades, but this of life. Yet he did not say, ‘of life’, but called it ‘a living way’, the ordinances, that is, that which abides. With good reason did he call His flesh ‘a veil’! When it was lifted up on high, then the things in heaven appeared”.

“To what should we ‘draw near’? We should draw near to the holy things, the Faith, the spiritual service, ‘with a true heart, in full assurance of faith!’ In the new covenant, nothing is seen, not the priest, the sacrifice, or the altar. Yet neither was that priest visible, but he stood within, and everyone else outside, the

²⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XIX, 1-2.

²⁷⁸ In ancient times, everyone stood in the presence of the king, while the king himself sat. The same imagery is present here. Christ has been seated at the Right Hand of God while His enemies will be made His footstool (Psalm 110:1).

whole people. But here, not only has the priest entered into the holy of holies, but we also enter in. Therefore he says, ‘in full assurance of faith’”.

“For ‘here’ it is possible to be deceived in the things that are seen, but not there. He shows that not faith only, but a virtuous life also is required, and the consciousness to ourselves of nothing evil, since we have ‘our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience’. The Holy of Holies receives ‘with full assurance’ those who are thus disposed. They are holy, as is the Holy of Holies; no profane person enters here. In the old covenant, they were sprinkled as to the body; we are ‘sprinkled’ as to the conscience, so that we may be sprinkled over with virtue itself. ‘Our body washed with pure water’ refers to the soul. We are to depart there and enter into the kingdom. Do not be over-curious, and demand reasoning. Faith is required!”

Holding Fast as the Day of the Lord Approaches: Hebrews 10:23-25

“Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more *as you see the Day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Paul wrote Hebrews in the early to mid 60’s AD. We can see this from the context, where there are no references to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, but there are references (such as Hebrews 10:25) that such may be coming soon²⁷⁹. “The Day of the Lord” had a very specific and clear meaning in the middle of the 1st Century: the vengeance of God on those who had crucified Christ. Hebrews seems to have been written at a time when one could see this vengeance approaching. Paul’s antidote to the Days of Vengeance: love one another.

This was also a time of explosive growth for various heresies, mostly attributed to Simon Magus and his followers²⁸⁰. Many of the Church Fathers attributed the heresies of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century to the teachings of Simon Magus. His teachings were so prolific and powerful that Emperor Claudius even erected a statue of Simon in Rome with the inscription “To Simon, the Holy God”. The “cults” that sprang up from Simon’s heresy denied the humanity of Christ, and denied that He was ever crucified in the flesh. They stated that Christ never had a human body, and that He only appeared to have been crucified. The resulting cults were all centered on one very knowledgeable and charismatic man. Paul’s comments “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some” undoubtedly refer to the practices of some of these cults.

John Chrysostom commented²⁸¹ on Paul’s words to say the Christian communities, on the other hand, were characterized by love as they gathered together. Good works naturally flowed from their love for each other.

²⁷⁹ For details on how the events of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Jerusalem were known to the Christians of that day, see the Study for the Holy Monday Evening Liturgy. For anyone who had the eyes to see it, there were continuous signs of the destruction of Jerusalem that increased in both in intensity and frequency as the “Day of the Lord” approached.

²⁸⁰ For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

²⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XIX, 3.

“Again in other places, ‘The Lord is at hand; be anxious for nothing’ (Philippians 4:5, 6). ‘Now our salvation is nearer: henceforth the time is short’ (Romans 13:11, 1 Corinthians 7:29). What does he mean by ‘not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together?’ Paul knew that much strength arises from being together and assembling together. ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matthew 18:20). Again, ‘That they may be One, as We are’ (John 17:11); and, ‘They had all one heart and one soul’ (Acts 4:32). The gathering together increased the love and, of necessity, the things of God must follow also. ‘Earnest prayer was made by the people’” (Acts 12:5).

“He knew that good works also arises from ‘gathering together’. As ‘iron sharpens iron’ (Proverbs 27:17), so also association increases love. If a stone rubbed against stone sends forth fire, how much more soul mingled with soul! This generates a sharpening of love, which means loving and being loved more. As they acquire zeal, they also acquire good works. If doing has greater force for instruction than speaking, you also have in your number many teachers, who effect this by their deeds. For a brother helped by a brother is as a strong city” (Proverbs 18:19 LXX).

Willful Rejection of Christ: Hebrews 10:26-31

“If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’, says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people’ (Deuteronomy 32:35-36). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:19-31).

Implied in Paul’s words here to the Hebrews are references to many of the cults that sprang from the teachings of Simon Magus. Some of their leaders had known the teachings of Christ firsthand. Some had even been numbered among the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20). For example, Scriptural references to some of Simon’s followers are:

- **Nicolas** of Antioch was one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:5) and one of the original Seventy (Luke 10:1-20). When Simon came to Antioch, Nicolas began to follow his teachings, and the Apostle John later rebuked Nicolas very strongly (Revelation 2:14-15).
- **Demas** was a companion of Paul and Luke at the time that Paul was under house arrest in Rome (c. 62 AD), and Paul mentioned him very favorably as he drafted his Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24). However, Demas began following the teachings of Simon shortly afterward, and within 5 years, Paul stated that Demas “had forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Hippolytus stated that Demas had been one of the Seventy, but became “a priest of idols”²⁸².
- **Phygellas and Hermogenes**: Just before his death in c. 67 AD, Paul wrote that Phygellas and Hermogenes had turned away from him (2 Timothy 1:15). Hippolytus stated that these

²⁸² Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 5.

two of the Seventy began to follow Simon's teachings, and were therefore deleted from the ranks of the Seventy²⁸³.

- **Alexander** was the son of Simon of Cyrene, who helped to carry Jesus' Cross (Mark 15:21). Together with his father and brother Rufus, who was one of the Seventy, Alexander helped to found the Church in Antioch (Acts 11:20). By the mid 60's AD, Alexander had become a follower of Simon, and Paul delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh²⁸⁴ on account of his blasphemy (1 Timothy 1:20). A year or two later, Alexander was instrumental in affecting Paul's martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:14-15).
- **Hymenaeus** was associated with Alexander and was also delivered over to Satan by Paul (1 Timothy 1:20). A year or two later, Hymenaeus was still busy teaching Simon's doctrine of the resurrection (2 Timothy 2:17-18).
- **Philetas** was an associate of Hymenaeus who also taught Simon's doctrine (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

Men of this mindset willfully rejected Christ in a most heinous way. In contrast to them, one might say that David willfully sinned (rejected Christ) in his lust for Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11:1-12:25). Yet David repented! The difference is that David was involved in breaking the Mosaic Law secretly, but the heretics were teaching all their Churches openly to disregard Christ. David repented when Nathan confronted him, but the heretics were not willing to repent. Reading the Epistle and its very strong words against those who "trample the Son of God underfoot" (Hebrews 10:29) makes more sense with these heretics in mind, and understanding that Judgment is about to fall on unrepentant Israel.

John Chrysostom, like the Apostle Jude, compared²⁸⁵ this to trees that yield no fruit (Jude 1:12). Good works are the fruit that he refers to, and this was notably absent in the followers of Simon Magus.

"Trees, which have been planted, and have had the advantage of all other care, and the hands and the labors of the cultivator, and yet yield no return for the labors, are pulled up by the roots, and handed over to the fire. Something of this kind also takes place in the case of our illumination. For when Christ has planted us and we have enjoyed the watering of the Spirit, and then show no fruit, fire awaits us, and flame unquenchable".

"For having spoken about forsaking the assembling together, he added, 'For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth'. There is need, he means, of good works. You were cleansed; you were set free from the charges against you, you have become a son. If then you return to your former vomit, there awaits you on the other hand excommunication and fire and whatever such things there are. There is no second sacrifice".

In Chrysostom's day, there were two groups that chafed on Paul's words in Hebrews, but for different reasons. One group delayed coming to Baptism, feeling that they would not have any second chance if they sinned willfully afterwards. The other group felt that it was not safe to impart the Mysteries (i.e. the Eucharist) to those who sinned for fear of trampling the Son of God

²⁸³ Hippolytus, "On the Seventy Apostles", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 5.

²⁸⁴ Compare 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. The intent was the eventual salvation of the individual through a greater recognition of who it is that he's in league with.

²⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XX, 1.

underfoot. Chrysostom stated²⁸⁶ that God does not thrust away the fallen to despair and He is not the enemy of our salvation. He did not say that there is no more repentance, but that there is no second Cross. 'By one sacrifice He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified' (Hebrews 10:14). Chrysostom explained 'Trampling the Son of God underfoot' as partaking of the mysteries (i.e. the Eucharist) in sin.

"Just as we make no account of those who are trodden under foot, so also, they who sin have made no account of Christ. You have become the Body of Christ; if you give yourself to the devil, he will tread you underfoot. He that does not accept a benefit, spites the benefactor. He made you a son and you wish to become a slave. He came to dwell with you, and you bring in wicked imaginations to Him. Christ wished to stay with you, and you tread Him down by drunkenness. 'Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, lest in time they trample them under their feet' (Matthew 7:6); that is, lest they despise, lest they repudiate them". Regarding the vengeance, Chrysostom said, "This is said in regard to their enemies, who are doing evil, not to those who are suffering evil".

The Results of the Lord Being Lifted Up

Crucifixion in the first century Roman world meant utter humiliation; this is especially so in Jesus' case. Consider the crown of thorns, the robe, the reed, the blows, the punching on the cheek, the spitting, the unjust "trial", the irony, the nails, the nakedness, the spear, etc. Yet the Scriptures speak of the crucifixion as being Jesus' glorification (John 12:23-24). This is 180 degrees different from most peoples' thinking, which is why Satan misunderstood also (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). And this is the focus of the Word of the Cross.

Much Grain Produced

From John 12:24, in connection with His glorification on the cross, Jesus also said that "unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain". The illustration here is the germination of a seed that is planted. Once in the ground, the seed itself contains enough to get the plant started. But once the roots of the plant get established the seed dies and is dwarfed by the plant. Many kernels of wheat -- each of which is another seed -- are produced on the stalk of the plant, where each new seed contains the same life as the original seed. If the seed never dies, it never germinates and the plant doesn't grow. The seed just remains alone as a seed.

In connection with this, John recorded Jesus' announcement at the Feast of Tabernacles: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). Then John remarks: "This He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). It was for this purpose that Jesus came to the hour of His crucifixion (John 12:27). Having bought with a price those who had fallen, and made their body a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), the new kernels of wheat now have the same life as the original seed given as a down payment (2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:14).

²⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XX, 2-3.

Judgment of the World

After Jesus stated that He came to the world for the Cross (John 12:27), He said, “Father, glorify Your Name” (John 12:28). The Father then spoke from heaven with a voice of thunder (John 12:29). Jesus said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world (Greek: *kosmos* = *world order*); now the ruler of this world (*kosmos*) will be cast down” (John 12:30-31).

John Chrysostom stated²⁸⁷ that the devil was judged by his own standards as the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). As Satan accuses us day and night, he speaks the truth about our sins to God. But what if the tables were turned on him?

“How then is the world judged in Christ? It shall be said, (as if a court of justice were sitting) to Satan: ‘well, you have slain all men because you found them guilty of sin. But why did you slay Christ? Is it not clear that you did it wrongfully?’ Therefore in Him the whole world shall be avenged”. In other words, the devil was judged by his own standards as the accuser of the brethren.

Augustin of Hippo gave more detail and stated²⁸⁸ that it was by the Justice of God that the devil was both conquered and outsmarted. Augustin’s argument can be paraphrased as follows:

“The method by which man was surrendered to the devil’s power ought not to be understood in the sense that it was the result of God’s command: rather He permitted it, but He did so with justice. When God deserted the sinner at the Fall, the instigator of the sin rushed in. Therefore God decided that to rescue man from the devil’s power, He should overcome the devil by justice, not by power. A trap was set, and the devil put Christ to death although he found in Him nothing that deserved death. ‘The prince of this world is coming, and he finds nothing, that is, no sin, in Me. But that the world may know that I am doing My Father’s will, arise, let us go from here’ (John 14:30-31). From there He went to His passion. What could be more just than to go as far as the death of the cross for the sake of justice? First justice conquered the devil, because Christ had no sin and was most unjustly put to death by the devil. Then power, in turn, conquered death by rising from the dead and ascending to heaven with the very flesh in which He was slain. Power would have overcome the devil even if Christ could not have been put to death by him; and yet it showed greater power to conquer death itself by resurrection than to avoid it by continuing to live.”

“The devil was conquered by his own trophy of victory; that is, death. By seducing the first man (Adam), he slew him. By slaying the last man (Christ), he lost the first from his snare.”

Reconciling the World to Christ

As Jesus spoke about the judgment of this world, He also said, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). Paul spoke of this a number of times. “In Him all the fullness (that is, of God) was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His Cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

²⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVII, 2.

²⁸⁸ Aurelius Augustinus, On the Trinity, XIII, xiii-xv, 17-19.

Speaking about Jews (who had received the oracles of God) versus Gentiles, Paul also said, “to create the two in Himself into one new man, thus making peace, that He might reconcile both in one body to God through the Cross. Through Him, we both have access by One Spirit to the Father (Ephesians 2:15-18). John Chrysostom commented²⁸⁹ that this does not mean that the Gentiles were raised to the high heritage that belonged to the commonwealth of the Jews, but that He has raised both to one yet higher.

Not only were Jews and Gentiles reconciled, but both were given the deaconate of reconciliation themselves, since both are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. “Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the deaconate of reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning their trespasses to them and has committed to us the Word (Greek: *logos*) of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ as God (the Father) beseeching through us: we beg on behalf of Christ, ‘Be reconciled to God’” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). John Chrysostom stated²⁹⁰, “We have succeeded to His functions. But if this appears to you a great thing, hear what follows also. He shows they do this not only on Christ’s behalf but also on behalf of the Father.”

Thus the reconciliation of the world to Christ encompasses not only everything in heaven and earth but also uses those who are the fruit of the One grain of wheat (that fell in the ground and died) as the chief reconcilers. Their mission requires that they imitate their Master and die also if necessary. Consider Satan’s reaction to all of this. In his pride, he thought he was smart; but he was totally outsmarted by the Cross.

Good Friday Ninth Hour Reading: Jeremiah 11:18-12:5, 9-11, 14-15 “Israel Will Be Ruined”

In the mid 2nd Century, Justin Martyr noted²⁹¹ that parts of this Reading from Jeremiah, in the Hebrew original, had been changed or deleted by the Jewish Scribes from most copies in his day in order to remove obvious references to Christ. In order to get back to the original Reading, the Septuagint text will be used here, since the Jewish scribes had no access to the Septuagint text used by the Christians. In italics is the portion that Justin said had been deleted. This portion is included in modern versions of the Hebrew text, but the wording is slightly different from the Septuagint. This Reading is also used for Holy Thursday Matins.

Put Wood Onto His Bread: Jeremiah 11:18-23

The Septuagint text reads as follows:

“O Lord, teach me, and I shall know: then I saw their practices. *But I as an innocent lamb led to the slaughter, knew not. Against me they devised an evil device, saying, ‘Come and let us put wood onto his bread, and let us utterly destroy him from off the land of the living, and let his name not be remembered any more’.* O Lord, that judge righteously, trying the reins and hearts, let me see your vengeance *taken* upon them, for to you I have declared my cause. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth²⁹², that seek my life, that say,

²⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V, v. 13.

²⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XI, 5.

²⁹¹ Justin Martyr, Dialog with Tyrpho, 72.

²⁹² Anathoth was the birthplace of the Prophet Jeremiah, and was located about 3 miles NE of Jerusalem.

‘You shall not prophesy at all in the name of the Lord, but if you do, you shall die by our hands’. Behold, I will visit them: their young men shall die by the sword; and their sons and their daughters shall die of famine. And there shall be no remnant *left* of them; for I will bring evil upon the dwellers in Anathoth, in the year of their visitation” (Jeremiah 11:18-23 LXX).

Jeremiah prophesied here about the Crucifixion and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem. But there is more to it than just that. To begin, Ambrose of Milan stated²⁹³ that the Son here speaks of the mystery of His coming Incarnation. The “Bread” is the Lord’s body which came down from heaven as the Life of the world (John 6:32-33), and this is why we call Him the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35, 48). Putting “wood onto His bread” refers to attaching His body to the Cross. The “men of Anathoth that seek my life” are the residents of Jerusalem and vicinity that crucified Christ, and the sword and famine that will be brought on them “in the year of their visitation” is the destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD and in c. 135 AD.

Tertullian, in his writings against the 2nd Century heretic, Marcion, stated²⁹⁴ that Jeremiah’s prophecy was a very ancient figure of the body of Christ. Marcion taught that Christ was not really a man, and therefore this part of Jeremiah’s prophecy was difficult for Marcion to interpret.

“When Jesus so earnestly expressed His desire to eat the Passover (Luke 22:15), He considered it His own feast; for it would have been unworthy of God to desire to partake of what was not His own. Then, having taken the bread and given it to His disciples, He made it His own body, by saying, ‘This is my body’ (Luke 22:19), that is, the figure of my body. A figure, however, there could not have been, unless there were first really a body. An empty thing, or phantom, is incapable of a figure. If, however, as Marcion might say, He pretended the bread was His body, because He lacked the truth of bodily substance, it follows that He must have given bread for us. It would contribute very well to the support of Marcion’s theory of a phantom body, that bread should have been crucified! But why call His body bread, and not rather some other edible thing, say a melon, which Marcion must have had in lieu of a heart! Marcion did not understand how ancient this figure of the body of Christ was. He said Himself by Jeremiah, ‘I was like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter, and I knew not that they devised a device against me, saying, Let us cast the tree upon His bread’ (Jeremiah 11:19), which means, of course, the cross upon His body. Thus, casting light, as He always did, upon the ancient prophecies, He declared plainly enough what He meant by the bread, when He called the bread His own body”.

Tertullian also said²⁹⁵ that the reference to bread linked Jesus’ body on the Cross to the mystery of the Bread of Life.

“Come, now, if you have read in the utterance of the prophet in the Psalms, ‘God has reigned from the tree’ (Psalm 96:10); I wait to hear what you understand from this. I fear you may perhaps think some carpenter-king is signified, and not Christ, who has reigned from that time onward when he overcame the death, which ensued from His passion of ‘the tree’”.

²⁹³ Ambrose, Exposition of the Christian Faith, IV, xii, 165-167.

²⁹⁴ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 40.

²⁹⁵ Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, vii, 10. For a similar discussion, see also: Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 3, 19.

“Similarly, again, Isaiah says: ‘For a child is born to us, and to us is given a Son’ (Isaiah 9:6). What novelty is that, unless he is speaking of the ‘Son’ of God? One is born to us the beginning of whose government has been made ‘on His shoulder’. What king in the world wears the ensign of his power on his shoulder, and does not bear either diadem on his head, or else scepter in his hand? But the novel ‘King of ages’, Christ Jesus, alone reared ‘on His shoulder’ His own novel glory, the Cross, that the Lord ‘might reign from the tree’. Of this tree likewise it is that God hints, through Jeremiah, that you would say, ‘Come, let us put wood into his bread, and let us bear him away out of the land of the living; and his name shall no more be remembered’ (Jeremiah 11:19). Of course on His body that ‘wood’ was put²⁹⁶; for so Christ has revealed, calling His body ‘bread’ (John 6:32-59), whose body the prophet announced under the term ‘bread’. If you shall still seek for predictions of the Lord’s Cross, the 22nd Psalm will at length be able to satisfy you, containing as it does the whole passion of Christ; singing, as He does, even at so early a date, His own glory. ‘They pierced my hands and feet’ (Psalm 22:16), which is the peculiar atrocity of the cross. Again when He implores the aid of the Father, ‘Save me’, He says, ‘Out of the mouth of the lion’ — of course, of death — ‘and from the horns of the unicorn my humility’ (Psalm 22:21 LXX), that is, from the ends of the cross. Which cross neither David himself suffered, nor any of the kings of the Jews, that you may not think the passion was of some other particular man than His, who alone was so savagely crucified by the people.

Those That Deal Treacherously: Jeremiah 12:1-5

The Septuagint text reads as follows:

“Righteous are you, O Lord, that I may make my defense to you; I will speak to you *of* judgments. Why does the way of ungodly *men* prosper? Those that deal very treacherously are flourishing. You have planted them, and they have taken root; they have begotten children, and become fruitful; you are near to their mouth, and far from their reins. But you, Lord, know me; you have proved my heart before you; purify them for the day of their slaughter. How long shall the land mourn, and the grass of the field withers for the wickedness of them, that dwell in it? The beasts and birds are utterly destroyed; because *the people* said, ‘God shall not see our ways’. Your feet run, and they cause you to faint; how will you prepare *to ride* upon horses? You have been confident in the land of your peace; how will you do in the roaring of Jordan?” (Jeremiah 12:1-5 LXX)

Jeremiah addressed a hardness of heart among the people of Israel in his day that required the Babylonian Captivity to cure. He warned the people that the Captivity was coming (Jeremiah 21), and when it came, He told them why it had come (Jeremiah 44:24-30). There had been total apostasy in Judah; but when the captives returned after the 70 years in captivity, they wept for the sins of Israel prior to the Captivity! (Nehemiah 8:9-10, 9:1-3) Thus the Captivity had served a useful purpose.

John Cassian addressed²⁹⁷ the people of Jerusalem who crucified Christ as having a similar hardness of heart but the hardness was too much for punishment in this life to cure.

²⁹⁶ That is, when they laid the crossbeam of the Cross on Him to carry it to Golgatha.

²⁹⁷ John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 31.

Some people can be admonished and corrected by adversities in this life, such as Judah was corrected by the Babylonian Captivity. Those that cannot be corrected, he says, are doomed to be punished with the demons. Cassian compared this situation to Babylon the Great, as described by John in Revelation. Cassian's words also relate to Paul's reference to "the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25) in the preceding Epistle.

"We ought to consider those men truly wretched and miserable who defile themselves with all kinds of sins and wickedness. Yet not only is there no visible sign of the devil's possession shown in them, but no temptation proportionate to their actions, or any scourge of punishment is brought to bear upon them. They are given no swift and immediate remedy in this world, whose 'hardness and impenitent heart', is too much for punishment in this life. They 'heap up for themselves wrath and indignation in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God' (Romans 2:5), 'where their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:44, 46, 48; Isaiah 66:24). Against them, the prophet is perplexed at the affliction of the saints, when he sees them subject to various losses and temptations. On the other hand, he sees sinners not only passing through the course of this world without any scourge of humiliation, but even rejoicing in great riches, and the utmost prosperity in everything, inflamed with uncontrollable indignation and fervor of spirit. He exclaims, 'But as for me, my feet had almost gone, my treading had almost slipped. I was grieved at the wicked, when I saw the peace of sinners. No one takes note of their death, nor are they punished strongly with stripes. They do not labor like men, neither shall they be scourged like other men' (Psalm 73:2-5), since hereafter they shall be punished with the devils, to whom in this world it was not granted to be scourged in the lot and discipline of sons, together with men. Jeremiah also, when conversing with God on this prosperity of sinners, never professes to doubt about the justice of God, as he says, 'You are just, O Lord, if I speak to You *of* judgments' (Jeremiah 12:1). Yet in his inquiry as to the reasons of this inequality, he proceeds to say, 'But yet I will speak what is just to You. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why is it well with all them that transgress and do wickedly? You have planted them and they have taken root; they prosper and bring forth fruit. You are near in their mouth and far from their reins'" (Jeremiah 12:1-2).

"And when the Lord mourns for their destruction by the prophet, and anxiously directs doctors and physicians to heal them, and in a manner urges them on to a similar lamentation and says, 'Babylon is suddenly fallen: she is destroyed. Howl for her: take balm for her pain, if so she may be healed' (Jeremiah 51:8; Revelation 18:2, Isaiah 13:19, 21:9). Then, in their despair, the angels, to whom is entrusted the care of man's salvation, make reply. Or at any rate the prophet in the person of the Apostles and spiritual men and doctors who see the hardness of their soul, and their impenitent heart say, 'We have healed Babylon; but she is not cured. Let us forsake her, and let us go every man to his own land because her judgment has reached even to the heavens, and is lifted up to the clouds'" (Jeremiah 51:9).

The Shepherds Destroyed the Vineyard: Jeremiah 12:9-11, 14-15

The Septuagint text reads as follows:

“Is not My inheritance to Me a cave of robbers, or a cave round about her? Go gather together all the wild beasts of the field, and let them come to devour her. Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard, they have defiled My portion, they have made My desirable portion a trackless wilderness; it is made a complete ruin. For my sake the whole land has been utterly ruined, because there is no one that lays *the matter* to heart”.

“For thus says the Lord, concerning all the evil neighbors that touch My inheritance, which I have divided to My people Israel. Behold, I *will* draw them away from their land, and I will cast out Judah from the midst of them. And it shall come to pass, after I have cast them out, *that* I will return, and have mercy upon them, and will cause them to dwell every one in his inheritance, and every one is his land” (Jeremiah 12: 9-11, 14-15 LXX).

Gregory Nazianzen described²⁹⁸ the situation of Jeremiah’s day in very dire terms, and likened it to the situation in Christ’s day:

1. The princes in her midst are like roaring lions, devouring souls in their might (Ezekiel 22:25 LXX).
2. Her priests have violated My laws and profaned My holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and profane, but all things were alike to them (Ezekiel 22:26).
3. The priests said not, ‘Where is the Lord?’, and they that handled the Law knew Me not (Jeremiah 2:8).
4. My flock became a prey, behold I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hands, and will gather them and make them My own. But the shepherds shall suffer such and such things, as bad shepherds ought (Ezekiel 34:8-10).
5. Many pastors have destroyed My vineyard, and have polluted My pleasant portion, till it was reduced to a trackless wilderness (Jeremiah 12:10).
6. God will consume both the wall and them that daubed it, that is, those who sin and those who throw a cloak over them (Ezekiel 13:14 LXX).

The situation in Israel, that Jeremiah addressed, repeats itself from time to time when the shepherds that God has established for His people fight against Him. The Early Church had similar difficulties with the leaders of the Jewish synagogue in the centuries that followed the Crucifixion. Early Christian tradition states²⁹⁹:

“Those are most certainly to be avoided who blaspheme God. The greatest part of the ungodly is ignorant of God; but these men, as fighters against God, are possessed with a willful evil disposition, as with a disease. From the wickedness of these heretics ‘pollution is gone out on all the earth’ (Jeremiah 23:15). For the wicked synagogue is now cast off by the Lord God, and His house is rejected by Him, as He says, ‘I have forsaken My house, I have left My inheritance’ (Jeremiah 12:7). Again, says Isaiah, ‘I will neglect My vineyard, and it shall not be pruned nor spaded, and thorns shall spring up upon it, as upon a desert; and I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it’” (Isaiah 5:6).

²⁹⁸ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration in Defense of His Flight to Pontus, II, 67-68.

²⁹⁹ Apostolic Constitutions, VI, ii, 5.

Good Friday Vespers *The Burial of Christ* *The Word of the Cross*

Gospel: Matthew 27:55-61 "The Burial of Jesus"

10th Gospel: Mark 15:43-47 "The Burial of Jesus"

11th Gospel: John 19:38-42 "The Burial of Jesus"

The Events of Christ's Burial

On the 14th of the month of Nisan, Jesus died on the Cross at about 3 PM, which was referred to as the Ninth Hour of the day (Mark 15:34-37). The 15th of the month of Nisan was a Sabbath, both from it being Saturday, the 7th day of the week, and because it was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:4-8). Since the 15th day of the month began at sundown, there was a sense of urgency among the Jewish leaders to get the dead bodies down from their crosses and buried to avoid the defilement that arises from dead bodies (John 19:31). Someone who had become defiled from a corpse could still participate in the events of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread according to the Law (Numbers 9:9-14), but the Jewish leaders undoubtedly put some restrictions³⁰⁰ on this. They, themselves, did not even enter the Praetorium (Pontus Pilate's residence) in order to avoid possible defilement from Gentiles and be unable to eat the Passover (John 18:28).

About 3 PM on Friday the 14th of Nisan, the Jewish leaders went to Pontius Pilate and asked that he order the soldiers at the Cross to break the legs of those who were crucified, so that they could be taken down and buried quickly. Death by crucifixion came as one was slowly strangled by his own collarbone. With the legs intact to help support one's weight, death could take days, and the cause of death could be sheer exhaustion. Breaking the legs, probably by large hammers, added to the pain of crucifixion, and brought death on quickly. Since Jesus was already dead, they did not bother to break His legs. John's account of this reads:

"Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:31-34).

The Scripture accounts do not give us a time of death of the two thieves, but we can presume that it would have been by 6 PM, or about the time that Joseph and Nicodemus began the burial rite for Jesus. When Joseph went to Pontius Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus, Pilate inquired whether Jesus had been dead for some time (Mark 15:44). Pilate wanted to make sure that it wasn't just an appearance of death that would allow for a subsequent resuscitation.

³⁰⁰ An example of the strict restrictions on "defilement" imposed by the Jewish leaders is simply washing one's hands: "Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:1-3).

In order to bury Jesus as the Scripture accounts describe, several distinct tasks were required.

1. Un-nail Him from the Cross, after pulling the Cross down.
2. Transport the Body to the tomb, which was nearby (John 19:42).
3. Embalm His body with the 100 lb. of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39-40).
4. Move His body into the tomb, and roll the stone against the entrance (Matthew 27:60).

The Un-Nailing From the Cross

Taking Jesus' body down from the Cross and un-nailing it was a difficult task. Roman crosses were sturdy pieces of wood. During the siege of Jerusalem that culminated in 70 AD, the Romans crucified people that they captured attempting to escape from the city. At one point, they crucified 500 people per day³⁰¹, nailing one body on top of another. For the Roman crosses to be capable of supporting this much weight, they had to be very sturdy, and therefore very heavy, at least 150 lb.

Elevating a condemned man onto a cross was easy. He was nailed to the cross while the cross laid flat on the ground, where the nails were placed between the two wrist bones (the *radius* and the *ulna*) for better support of the body on the cross. Several strong men then lifted the cross part way up while others guided it with ropes attached to the crossbeam. With the cross standing vertical, it could be slid over a little and dropped into a deep hole.

To take the cross down, one had to either lift the cross out of the hole (at least 300 lb. for the cross with its victim), or dig out the hole sideways so that the cross could be lowered slowly. Joseph and Nicodemus were both wealthy, but elderly, men. They obviously didn't do all this themselves, but had a team of servants to help them. This team of servants would have had the task of pulling out the nails, which also required some physical strength. For more discussion on the "Un-Nailing", see the Gospel lesson for Good Friday, 9th Hour Prayers.

Transporting Jesus' Body to the Tomb

In order to transport Jesus' body from the site of the Crucifixion to the tomb, he wrapped His body in fine linen:

“Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb, which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb” (Mark 15:46).

The tomb was nearby, and was part of the same garden that Golgotha was located in. The tomb had been created, like many tombs in that area, by boring into a hillside of solid rock.

“Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. There they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby” (John 19:41-42).

Joseph, being elderly, had intended for himself to be interred side by side with the Master out of his devotion to Jesus. It was common for many family members to be interred in the same crypt.

³⁰¹ Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, V, xi, 1-2.

In modern times, there has been much attention given to the “Shroud of Turin”, which some claim to be the burial wrappings of Jesus. As discussed in the next section, it could not have been the burial wrappings; the only possibility³⁰² is for it to have been the “fine linen cloth” that was used to transport Jesus’ body from the Cross to the site of the tomb.

The Embalming of Jesus

At the site of the tomb, Joseph and Nicodemus, along with their servants performed the embalming of Jesus’ body.

“So he came and took the body of Jesus. Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night (John 3:1-21), came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury” (John 19:38-40).

This is the same type of burial as was given to Lazarus when he died – that is, Jesus and Lazarus were wrapped with strips of linen to form a mummy-like sarcophagus. This was the type of burial that only rich people could afford. By contrast, the son of the widow of Nain was being carried to a pauper’s grave. He was being carried in an open coffin (Luke 7:14). When Jesus spoke to him, “Young man, I say to you, arise”, he sat up and began to speak immediately (Luke 7:15). There was no need to “unbind him” as was necessary for Lazarus when he was raised (John 11:44).

Modern studies have been done³⁰³ regarding the burial practices for the wealthy that were common in Jewish society in the 1st Century.

“The body was covered in spices and in paste and this was tied to the body by layers of white roller bandage. The paste hardened and impregnated the bandages until a hard preservative mold or cocoon was formed about the body. A cap was put on the head, and often the jaw was held in position by a bandage under the chin”.

This detail became important later at the Resurrection. When Peter and John came to the tomb at the urging of Mary Magdalene (John 20:2-3), the first thing that they saw was that the “mummy” was empty and undisturbed; Jesus had risen right through the burial wrappings! This was evidence of the Resurrection, since the body could not have gotten out of the sarcophagus without cutting the wrappings. Orthodox iconography is helpful to us in depicting the scene at the tomb with an empty sarcophagus.

“Then Simon Peter came, following John, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying *there*, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead” (John 20:6-9).

One might question exactly what the Apostle John meant when he said that he and Peter, “saw and believed”? Did they believe in the Resurrection from seeing the burial clothes, or did

³⁰² There are serious doubts even here. Modern scientists have discovered that the “blood stains” are actually red ochre paint.

³⁰³ Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 72-74

they merely believe the report of the women that the tomb was empty? Augustin stated³⁰⁴ that it was the report of the women that Peter and John believed when they examined the empty sepulchre.

“Some, by not giving due attention, suppose that John believed that Jesus had risen again; but there is no indication of this from the words that follow. For what does he mean by immediately adding, ‘For as yet they knew not the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead’? (John 20:9) He could not then have believed that He had risen again, when he did not know that it behooved Him to rise again. What then did he see? What was it that he believed? What but this, that he saw the sepulcher empty, and believed what the woman had said, that He had been taken away from the tomb? Thus also when they heard of it from the Lord Himself, although it was uttered in the plainest terms, yet from their custom of hearing Him speaking by parables, they did not understand, and believed that something else was His meaning”.

John Chrysostom, however, stated³⁰⁵ that it was the Resurrection that Peter and John believed, but only after they had examined the site very carefully. Chrysostom noted, in John’s account, that John admitted his own superficial examination and was convinced by Peter’s more careful analysis.

“Mary didn’t know as yet anything clearly concerning the Resurrection, but thought there had been a removal of the body, and told this to the disciples. John did not deprive the woman of such praise, nor thought it a shame that they should have learned these things first from her who had passed the night in watching. When she came and said these things, they drew near with great eagerness to the sepulcher, and saw the linen clothes lying there, which was a sign of the Resurrection. If any person had removed the body, would they, before doing so have stripped it? If any had stolen it, would they have taken the trouble to remove the napkin, and roll it up, and lay it in a place by itself? They would have taken the body as it was. On this account John tells us by anticipation that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body as firmly as lead. In order that when you hear that the napkins lay apart, you may not endure those who say that He was stolen. A thief would not have been so foolish as to spend so much trouble on a superfluous matter. Why would he undo the clothes? How could he have escaped detection if he had done so? He would probably have spent much time in so doing, and be found out by delaying and loitering. But why do the clothes lie apart, while the napkin was wrapped together by itself? This was done that you may learn that it was not the action of men in confusion or haste; the placing some in one place, some in another, and the wrapping them together. From this they believed in the Resurrection. On this account Christ afterwards appeared to them, when they were convinced by what they had seen. Observe also the absence of boastfulness in John’s account, how he witnesses to the exactness of Peter’s search. He himself having gotten there before Peter, and having seen the linen clothes, didn’t inquire farther, but withdrew. But Peter, that fervent one, passing farther in, looked at everything carefully, saw somewhat more, and then John too was summoned to the sight”.

³⁰⁴ Augustin of Hippo, Tractates on the Gospel of John, CXX, 9.

³⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 4.

John Chrysostom also spoke³⁰⁶ of the courage of Joseph to do what he did. The result of his efforts was the removal of any suspicion regarding the details of the Resurrection.

“This was Joseph, who was concealing his discipleship; now, however, he had become very bold after the death of Christ. He was not an obscure person, but one of the council, and highly distinguished; from which circumstance especially one may see his courage. He exposed himself to death, making him enemies with everyone by his affection to Jesus, both having dared to beg the body, and not having desisted until he obtained it. But not only by taking it, nor by burying it in a costly manner, but also by laying it in his own new tomb, he showed his love, and his courage. This was not so ordered without purpose, but so there would not be any suspicion, that one had risen instead of another”.

Chrysostom continued to speak³⁰⁷ about Joseph’s and Nicodemus’ perception of Jesus as still being that of a mere man, and that they acted out of loving affection. Their deeds, however, stand out compared to the scattering and cowardice of the Twelve.

“Joseph figured that the Cross quenched the anger of the Jews; so he approached without fear, and took charge of His funeral. Nicodemus also assisted him, and furnished a costly burial. They still thought of Him as a mere man. They brought those spices whose special nature is to preserve the body for a long time, and not to allow it quickly to yield to corruption, which was an act of men imagining nothing great respecting Him. But they exhibited very loving affection. But why did no one of the Twelve come, neither John, Peter, nor any other of the more distinguished disciples? Nor does the writer conceal this point. If anyone might say that it was from fear of the Jews, Joseph and Nicodemus were also occupied by the same fear. Joseph was, it said, ‘A secret disciple for fear of the Jews’ (John 19:38). No one can say that Joseph acted thus because he greatly despised the Jewish leaders; but though himself afraid, still he came. But John, who was present (John 19:25-27), and had seen Him expire, did nothing of the kind. Joseph was a man of high rank, as is clear from the funeral, and known to Pilate, on which account also he obtained the favor. He buried Him, not as a criminal, but magnificently, after the Jewish fashion, as some great and admirable one”.

First Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 33:11-23 "The Glory of God"

At the Burial of Christ, we take a moment to look back at Who this is that is being buried, and consider what Moses saw on the Mountain and in the Tabernacle. There are three aspects to “seeing God” presented in the Scriptures.

1. Seeing Him in human form, such as Christ appeared to the people of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), or as He appeared to Abraham (Genesis 18:1-15).
2. Seeing Him in a transfigured human form, such as Peter, James and John saw on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-7).
3. Seeing Him in His Divine Essence, which man cannot do (Exodus 33:20, John 1:18)

In this parable from the Old Testament, we have some seeming contradictory statements. It says that “the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as if one should speak to his friend” (Exodus

³⁰⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXVIII.

³⁰⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 3.

33:11). But yet it also says that Moses couldn't see the Lord's face. "You shall not be able to see my face; for no man shall see my face, and live" (Exodus 33:20). The Lord said the same thing on the occasion of Miriam's rebellion:

"My servant Moses *is* not so; he is faithful in all My house. I will speak to him mouth to mouth apparently, and not in dark speeches; and he has seen the Glory of the Lord; and why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:7-8 LXX).

In the text just prior to this Parable, the Scriptures describe the events surrounding the Lord's speaking to Moses. Moses pitched the tent outside the Camp and called it the Tabernacle of meeting. Moses then went out to the Tabernacle while the people watched. As he entered the Tabernacle, the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door. When this happened, all the people fell on their face and worshipped.

"Moses took the tabernacle and pitched it outside the camp, at a distance from the camp; and it was called the Tabernacle of Testimony. It came to pass *that* everyone that sought the Lord went forth to the Tabernacle which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went into the Tabernacle outside the camp, all the people stood everyone watching by the doors of his tent; and when Moses departed, they took notice until he entered into the Tabernacle. When Moses entered into the Tabernacle, the pillar of the cloud descended, and stood at the door of the Tabernacle, and *God* talked to Moses. All the people saw the pillar of the cloud standing by the door of the Tabernacle, and all the people stood and worshipped everyone at the door of his tent. The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as if one should speak to his friend; and he retired into the camp: but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, departed not from the Tabernacle" (Exodus 33:7-11 LXX).

As a result of Moses' meetings with the Lord, his face shone, and the people were afraid to come near him. In the words of the LXX text, he "was glorified". So Moses put a veil over his face whenever he spoke with the people. But when he went in to speak to the Lord, he took the veil off.

"And when Moses went down from the mountain, *there were* the two tablets in the hands of Moses. As he went down from the mountain, Moses knew not that the appearance of the skin of his face was glorified, when God spoke to him. Aaron and all the elders of Israel saw Moses, and the appearance of the skin of his face was made glorious, and they feared to approach him. Moses called them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the synagogue turned towards him, and Moses spoke to them. Afterwards all the children of Israel came to him, and he commanded them all things, whatever the Lord had commanded him on Mount Sinai. When he ceased speaking to them, he put a veil on his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak to Him, he took off the veil till he went out, and he went forth and spoke to all the children of Israel whatever the Lord commanded him. The children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that it was glorified; and Moses put the veil over his face, till he went in to speak with Him" (Exodus 34:29-35 LXX).

If Moses was accustomed to these face to face meetings, where he "was glorified", why did he desire to have the Lord show Himself to him, saying, "Manifest yourself to me" (Exodus

33:18). What was Moses accustomed to seeing, and how was this different from what he saw from the cleft of the rock? Most of the Church Fathers state that Moses did not see a physical Christ in His humanity, but he saw a vision of this. But there is another aspect to the Glory of God that is applicable here.

Christ's Glory Was the Cross

The day before the Crucifixion, Jesus spoke to His disciples about His glorification, where He would be glorified because He went to the Cross of His own free will:

“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:23-25).

Going to the Cross required a great deal of humility and love on the part of Christ. Moses, himself, exhibited an extraordinary measure of humility and love just like Christ, and dealing with a stubborn and stiff-necked people for forty years was a Cross for Moses. Moses, like Christ, was so humble that he didn't even defend himself when Miriam and Aaron spoke against him³⁰⁸. “The man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

Moses' love for the people of Israel was so great that he pleaded for the Lord's forgiveness following the idolatry of the Golden Calf. The Lord had offered to annihilate them all and raise up a great nation descending from Moses. In this, the Lord was testing Moses' humility and his love for his people. Moses even offered to forfeit his own salvation (Exodus 32:32), as the Apostle Paul later offered to do, in order that his people might be saved (Romans 9:1-5).

“Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book, which You have written” (Exodus 32:31-32).

How Did Christ Speak to Moses Face to Face?

“And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as if one should speak to his friend; and he retired into the camp: but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, departed not from the Tabernacle”.

“And Moses said to the Lord, ‘You say to me, Lead on this people; but you have not showed me whom You will send with me, but You have said to me, I know you above all, and you have favor with Me. If then I have found favor in Your sight, reveal Yourself to me, that I may evidently see You; that I may find favor in Your sight, and that I may know that this great nation *is* Your people’. And He said, ‘I myself will go before you, and give you rest’. And he said to Him, ‘If You do not go up with us Yourself, don't bring me up from here. And how shall it be surely known, that both I and this people have found favor with You, except only if You go

³⁰⁸ Compare Matthew 26:53, where Christ could have defended Himself with more than 12 legions of angels, but didn't.

with us? So both I and Your people shall be glorified beyond all the nations, as many as are upon the earth”.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will also do for you this thing, which you have spoken; for you have found grace before me, and I know you above all’” (Exodus 33:11-17).

In this Reading, the Lord was described as speaking to Moses regularly as a man speaks to his friend. By “the Lord”, the Scriptures mean Christ. At the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:14), Christ spoke to Moses, but there was no person that Moses could see. Inside the Tabernacle, with Joshua present, Moses spoke with a person. But Christ was not yet incarnate of the Virgin Mary. How did this happen?

Tertullian stated³⁰⁹ that the Moses had visions of Christ in the form of man that He would later assume from the Virgin Mary. In His humanity, it is possible to behold Him, but with difficulty, as Peter, James and John discovered on the Mountain of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). In His deity, it is not possible to behold Him.

“When Moses desired to see the Lord, saying, ‘If therefore I have found grace in Your sight, reveal Yourself to me, that I may see You distinctly’ (Exodus 33:13), the sight which he desired to have was of that condition which He was to assume as man, and which as a prophet he knew was to occur. Respecting the *face* of God, however, he had already heard, ‘No man shall see Me, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). ‘This thing’, said He, ‘which you have spoken, will I do unto you’. Then Moses said, ‘Show me Your glory’. The Lord, with like reference to the future, replied, ‘I will pass before you in My glory’, etc. Then at the last He says, ‘Then you shall see My back’ (Exodus 33:17-23). Not loins, or calves of the legs, did he want to behold, but the glory which was to be revealed in the latter days³¹⁰. He had promised that He would make Himself thus face to face visible to him, when He said to Aaron, ‘If there shall be a prophet among you, I will make Myself known to him by vision, and by vision will I speak with him; but not so is My manner to Moses; with *him* will I speak mouth to mouth’, that is to say, in the form of man which He was to assume, ‘and not in dark speeches’” (Numbers 12:7-8).

So then, in what form did Christ appear to Moses? Christ appeared in different forms to him at different times. At the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:14), Christ had no form when He appeared to Moses. On the top of Mt. Sinai, Moses walked into the midst of a huge fire (the Pillar of Fire) that made the mountain top look like it “burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens” (Deuteronomy 4:11). This made a very awesome spectacle, accompanied by the thunder, the lightning and the very loud trumpet sound (Exodus 19:16), in addition to the earthquake (Psalm 114:4), all of which Basil attributed³¹¹ to the angels around the Throne of God. At that time,

“The LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; *you only heard a voice*” (Deuteronomy 4:12).

³⁰⁹ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 22.

³¹⁰ “The latter days” refers to the fulfillment of time when Christ was incarnate.

³¹¹ Basil, On the Spirit, 14.

Clement of Alexandria, in speaking³¹² about how God can only be known through faith, stated that Moses entered the thick darkness on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:21, Deuteronomy 4:11-12) by faith.

“Moses, persuaded that God is not to be known by human wisdom, said, ‘Show me Your glory’ (Exodus 33:18); and into the thick darkness where God’s voice was, pressed to enter. That is, he entered into the inaccessible and invisible ideas respecting Existence. God is not in darkness or in place, but above both space and time, and qualities of objects. Wherefore neither is He at any time in a part, either as containing or as contained, either by limitation or by section. ‘For what house will you build for Me?’ (Isaiah 66:1), said the Lord? He has not even built one for Himself, since He cannot be contained. Though heaven is called His throne, not even thus is He contained, but He rests delighted in the creation”.

When the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, Moses did not have any apparent difficulty, such as Peter, James and John did on the Mountain of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-6). But then when Moses asked Christ to show him His Glory, Christ had to shield Moses in the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33:22). What was different? Moses never saw Christ’s Deity, and if he did, he would have died on the spot, since the Lord said, “No man shall see My face, and live” (Exodus 33:20). The question is whether Moses saw Christ in a form of pre-Incarnate humanity, or whether he saw a vision of Christ.

Moses Saw Visions of Christ in the Tabernacle

Once Christ became incarnate, people had no difficulty looking at Him, including unbelievers, because His humanity veiled His Deity. On the mountain of Transfiguration, Jesus’ humanity shone with the uncreated Light of His Deity, and Peter, James and John had difficulty looking at Him. When the Apostle John stated that ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18), this refers to seeing Him in His Deity. In His transfigured state, even His humanity becomes difficult to behold.

John Chrysostom pondered³¹³ the seeming contradiction of no man ever “seeing God” at any time (John 1:18), and yet others “saw Him” in some way. In all cases, those who “saw God”, including the angels, saw some condescension where He made Himself visible to them. No one has seen His Essence, including the angels! The one work of the angels is to praise God, not to behold Him. Only the Son beholds Him. Everyone else can only behold Him in a vision as He allows.

“By what connection of thought does the Apostle come to say, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18)? After showing the infinite difference between the gifts of Christ and those ministered by Moses, he adds the cause of the difference. Moses, as being a servant, was minister of lower things, but Christ being Lord and King, and the King’s Son, brought to us things far greater, being ever with the Father, and beholding Him continually; wherefore He said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’. What then shall we answer to Isaiah when he says, ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up’ (Isaiah 6:1); and to John himself testifying of Him, that ‘Isaiah said these things when he had seen His glory’? (John 12:41) What about Ezekiel; for he too beheld Him sitting above the

³¹² Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, II, 2.

³¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 1-2.

Cherubim (Ezekiel 1, 10)? What about Daniel; for he too said, 'The Ancient of days did sit' (Daniel 7:9)? What about Moses himself, 'Show me Your Glory, that I may see You so as to know You' (Exodus 33:13, LXX, paraphrased)? Jacob took his name from this very thing, being called 'Israel'; for Israel is 'one that sees God'. How then did John say, 'No man has seen God at any time'?"

"It is to declare, that all these were instances of His condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. Had they seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms, since His Essence is simple, without form, or parts, or bounding lines. It does not sit, stand, or walk; these things all belong to bodies. But how He is, He only knows. This He has declared by the prophet Hosea saying, 'I have multiplied visions, and used similitude by the hands of the prophets' (Hosea 12:10); that is, 'I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was'. For since His Son was about to appear in the flesh, He prepared them from old to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It. But what God really is, not only have not the prophets seen, but not even angels or archangels".

"If you ask the angels, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, 'Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good will towards men' (Luke 2:14). If you desire to learn something from Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that 'heaven and earth are full of His glory' (Isaiah 6:3). If you inquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. 'Praise Him', said David, 'all His hosts' (Psalm 148:2). But the Son only beholds Him, and the Holy Spirit. How can any created nature ever see the Uncreated? If we are absolutely unable clearly to discern any incorporeal power whatsoever, even though created, as has been often proved in the case of angels, much less can we discern the Essence which is incorporeal and uncreated. Therefore Paul said, 'Whom no man has seen, nor can see'" (1 Timothy 6:16).

"Does then this special attribute belong to the Father only, not to the Son? It belongs also to the Son; and to show that it does so, hear Paul declaring this point, and saying, that He 'is the Image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15). Now if He is the Image of the Invisible, He must be invisible Himself, for otherwise He would not be an 'image'. And wonder not that Paul said in another place, "God was manifested in the Flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16); because the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to His Essence. Besides, Paul shows that He is invisible, not only to men, but also to the powers above. For after saying, 'was manifested in the Flesh', he adds, 'was seen of angels'. So that even to angels He then became visible, when He put on the Flesh; but before that time they did not so behold Him, because even to them His Essence was invisible".

"How then did Christ say, 'Despise not one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven'? (Matthew 18:10) God does not have a face. He also said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8), He means that intellectual vision which is possible to us, and the having God in the thoughts. So also in the case of angels, we must understand that by reason of their pure and sleepless nature they do nothing else, but always image to themselves God. Therefore Christ said that 'No man knows the Father, except the Son' (Matthew 11:27). We are not all in

ignorance of God; but no one knows Him as the Son knows Him. Many have seen Him in the mode of vision permitted to them, but no one has beheld His Essence. So many of us know God, but what His substance can be none knows, except only He that was begotten of Him. For by 'knowledge' He here means an exact idea and comprehension, such as the Father has of the Son. 'As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father'" (John 10:15).

Cyril of Jerusalem generalized³¹⁴ to say that the incorporeal couldn't be subject to bodily sight. Human eyes simply cannot see God; but by His works, we can attain some appreciation for Him.

"To look upon God with eyes of flesh is impossible; for the incorporeal cannot be subject to bodily sight. The Only begotten Son of God Himself has testified, saying, 'No man has seen God at any time' (John 1:18). If according to that which is written in Ezekiel anyone should understand that Ezekiel saw Him, yet what did the Scripture say? 'He saw the likeness of the glory of the Lord' (Ezekiel 1:28); not the Lord Himself, but the likeness of His glory, not the glory itself, as it really is. When he saw merely the likeness of the glory, and not the glory itself, he fell to the earth from fear. Now if the sight of the likeness of the glory brought fear and distress on the prophets, anyone who should attempt to behold God Himself would to a certainty lose his life, according to the saying, 'No man shall see My face and live' (Exodus 33:20). For this cause God of His great loving-kindness spread out the heaven as a veil of His proper Godhead that we should not perish. The word is not mine, but the Prophet's. 'If You shall tear open the heavens, trembling will take hold of the mountains at Your sight, and they will flow down' (Isaiah 64:1 LXX). Why do you wonder that Ezekiel fell down on seeing the likeness of the glory?"

"The Divine Nature then is impossible to see with eyes of flesh. But from the works, which are Divine, it is possible to attain to some conception of His power, according to Solomon, who says, 'By the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionately the Maker of them is seen'" (Wisdom 13:5).

Cyril of Jerusalem stated³¹⁵ that Moses and the prophets saw Christ, as far as each was able. At the Incarnation, Christ took on a human nature to do this, and by doing so, He revealed and proclaimed the Father, just as He had to Moses. In showing Moses His glory, Christ said, "I will pass by before you with My Glory, and I will call by My Name, the Lord, before you" (Exodus 33:19).

"That you may be sure that it was Christ who was seen by Moses, hear Paul's testimony. He says, 'They all drank of a spiritual rock that followed them; and the rock was Christ' (1 Corinthians 10:4). Again, 'By faith Moses forsook Egypt', and, 'Accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt' (Hebrews 11:26-27). This Moses says to Him, 'Show me Yourself' (Exodus 33:18). You see that the Prophets also in those times saw the Christ, that is, as far as each was able. 'Show me Yourself, that I may see You with understanding'. But He said, 'No man can see My face, and live' (Exodus 33:20). For this reason then, because no man could see the face of the Godhead and live, He took on Him the face of human nature, that we might see this and live. Yet

³¹⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IX, 1-2.

³¹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, X, 7-8.

when He wished to show even that with a little majesty at the Transfiguration, when ‘His face shone as the sun’ (Matthew 17:2), the disciples fell down frightened. If then His bodily countenance, shining not in its full power, but according to the capacity of the Disciples, frightened them, so that even thus they could not bear it, how could any man gaze upon the majesty of the Godhead? ‘A great thing,’ said the Lord, ‘you desire, O Moses; and I approve your insatiable desire, and I will do this thing for you, but according as you are able. ‘Behold, I will put you in the cleft of the rock; for as being little, you shall lodge in a little space’” (Exodus 33:22).

“Now here I wish you to make safe what I am going to say, because of the Jews. Our object is to prove that the Lord Jesus Christ was with the Father. The Lord then said to Moses, ‘I will pass by before you with My glory, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you’ (Exodus 33:19). Being Himself the Lord, what Lord does He proclaim? You see how He was covertly teaching the godly doctrine of the Father and the Son. Again, in what follows it is written word for word. ‘The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, both keeping righteousness and showing mercy to thousands, taking away iniquities, transgressions, and sins’ (Exodus 33:19). Then in what follows, Moses bowed his head and worshipped before the Lord who proclaimed the Father, and said: ‘Go then, O Lord, in the midst of us’” (Exodus 33:16).

There is some significance to the Lord’s words to Moses, “I know you above all” (Exodus 33:12). Gregory of Nyssa pointed out³¹⁶ that “the Lord knows them that are His” (2 Timothy 2:19); and thus He says to Moses, “I knew you above all”. This can be contrasted to those condemned in their wickedness, where He Who knows all things says, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23).

Moses Sees the Glory of God from the Cleft in the Rock

“And *Moses* says, ‘Reveal Yourself to me’. And *God* said, ‘I will pass by before you with My Glory, and I will call by My Name, the Lord, before you; and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and will have pity on whom I will have pity’. And *God* said, ‘You shall not be able to see My Face; for no man shall see My Face, and live’. And the Lord said, ‘Behold, *there is* a place by Me: you shall stand upon the rock; and when My Glory shall pass by, then I will put you into a hole of the rock; and I will cover you over with My Hand, until I shall have passed by. And I will remove My Hand, and then shall you see My Back Parts; but My Face shall not appear to you’” (Exodus 33:18-23 LXX).

The person that Moses addressed in his request to see the Glory of God was the Son of God, not the Father. But did Moses see the Son of God as a man or as a vision? And if the Son of God was accustomed to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11), why did Moses ask Him to show Himself to him? Moses spoke of his contact with God:

³¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man”, Philosophical Works, III, xx, 1.

“He said to them, Hear My words: If there should be of you a prophet to the Lord, I will be made known to him in a vision, and in sleep will I speak to him. My servant Moses *is* not so; he is faithful in all My house. I will speak³¹⁷ to him mouth to mouth apparently, and not in dark speeches; and he has seen the Glory of the Lord; and why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?” (Numbers 12:6-8)

Tertullian stated³¹⁸ that it was always the person of the Son of God Who spoke to men and Who led them in various ways.

“He who always spoke to Moses was the Son of God Himself; who was always seen. No one ever saw God the Father, and lived (Exodus 33:20). Accordingly it is agreed that the Son of God Himself spoke to Moses, and said to the people, ‘Behold, I send My Angel before your face, to guard you on the march, and to introduce you to the land which I have prepared for you. Listen to Him, and don’t be disobedient to Him; for He has not escaped your notice, since My Name is on Him’ (Exodus 23:20-26). Now He called Him an ‘angel’ on account of the magnitude of the mighty deeds which He was to achieve, which mighty deeds Joshua the son of Nun did, and on account of His office of prophet announcing the divine will. This is similar to the Spirit calling the forerunner of Christ, John, a future ‘angel’, through the prophet. ‘Behold, I send My angel before Your — that is, Christ’s — face, who shall prepare³¹⁹ Your way before You” (Malachi 3:1).

Tertullian also described³²⁰ the relationship of the Son to the Father in addressing the heresy of Marcion, where Marcion confused the Father and the Son. It was the Son, not the Father Who Moses addressed on Mt. Sinai. The Son became man in order that man might be able to deal on equal terms with God.

“Now we believe that Christ always acted in the Name of God the Father; that He actually from the beginning held intercourse with men; actually communed with patriarchs and prophets. He was the Son of the Creator; was His Word; whom God made His Son by emitting Him from His own self, and thenceforth set Him over every dispensation and administration of His will. With regard to the Father, the Gospel testifies that He was never visible, according to the word of Christ, ‘No man knows the Father, except the Son’ (Matthew 11:27). Even in the Old Testament He had declared, ‘No man shall see me, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). He means that the Father is invisible, in whose authority and in whose Name was He God who appeared as the Son of God. Whatever attributes therefore you require as worthy of God, must be found in the Father, who is invisible and unapproachable. Those qualities, which you censure as unworthy, must be supposed to be in the Son, who has been seen, heard, and encountered. The Witness and Servant of the Father united in Himself man and God, God in mighty deeds, in weak ones man, in order that He may give to man as much as He

³¹⁷ Note that the LXX text uses the future tense while the Hebrew text uses the present tense. Tertullian stated that the future tense refers to Christ speaking to Moses face to face at the Transfiguration (Against Praxeas, II, vii, 14-15).

³¹⁸ Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, I, vii, 9.

³¹⁹ Compare also Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27.

³²⁰ Tertullian, The Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 2, 27.

takes from God. What in your esteem is the entire disgrace of my God, is in fact the sacrament of man's salvation. God held converse with man that man might learn to act as God. God dealt on equal terms with man that man might be able to deal on equal terms with God. God was found little, that man might become very great".

There were times when the Son became visible, such as the meeting with Abraham, where Christ and two angels visited Abraham. Abraham washed their feet and Abraham fed them bread, lamb with butter and milk (Genesis 18:1-8), but this was temporary.

Comparison: Christ's Appearance to Abraham

If the Son was only visible to the Patriarchs and the prophets in a glass, and an enigma, in vision and dream, what happened when the Lord visited Abraham, accompanied by two angels? The text reads:

“And God appeared to him by the oak of Mamre, as he sat by the door of his tent at noon. He lifted up his eyes and beheld, and three men stood before him; and having seen them he ran to meet them from the door of his tent, and bowed himself to the ground. He said, ‘Lord, if indeed I have found grace in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Let water now be brought, and let them wash Your feet, and refresh *Yourselves* under the tree. I will bring bread, and You shall eat, and after this You shall depart on Your journey, on account of which *refreshment* You have turned aside to your servant’. He said, ‘So do, as you have said’. Abraham hurried to the tent to Sarah, and said to her, ‘Hurry, and knead three measures of fine flour, and make cakes’. Abraham ran to the herd, and took a young calf, tender and good, and gave it to his servant, and he hurried to dress it. He took butter and milk, and the calf which he had dressed; and he set them before Them; and They ate while he stood by them under the tree” (Genesis 18:1-8 LXX).

In this account, Christ had His feet washed by Abraham, and He and the two angels ate dinner with Abraham as Abraham stood by serving them. Later that afternoon, the two angels went to Sodom, and Lot washed their feet before serving them a feast that included unleavened bread. These angels were in a recognizable-enough human form that the men of Sodom desired to rape them in the street after dinner (Genesis 19:1-11). Yet the angels had to cover a distance of around 40 miles from mid-afternoon, when they finished dinner with Abraham, to arrive at Sodom in the evening. This would be moving rather quickly if they were mere human beings; as angels, this is no problem.

Is all this an enigma, vision or dream? John of Damascus stated³²¹ that all the appearances of Christ in the Old Testament were “figurative manifestations of God”. Hilary of Poitiers stated³²² that the appearances of the angels to Lot “were nothing more than a vision of angels”.

The interesting aspect of the account is that both Abraham and Lot recognized them as other-worldly creatures quickly. In the case of Abraham, “He lifted his eyes and looked, and

³²¹ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 1.

³²² Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, IV, 28.

behold, three men were standing by him. When he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant’” (Genesis 18:2-3). In the case of Lot, “The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them*, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. He said, ‘Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way’” (Genesis 19:1-2).

What was it about the appearance of the Lord and the two angels that Abraham and Lot recognized? The text (Genesis 18:1) states that God appeared to Abraham (Hebrew: *Jehovah*, Greek LXX: *Theos*). Abraham called Him Lord (Hebrew: Adoni, Greek: Kurios, both meaning Master), and Lot used the same term to refer to the angels who visited him (Genesis 19:2). John Chrysostom, in commenting on the spiritual benefits of hospitality, stated³²³ that Abraham and Lot did not recognize the visitors immediately, but acted as they did simply out of a very hospitable spirit. But their recognition of who the visitors were must have come rather quickly.

And conversely, what was it about the appearance of the two angels that the men of Sodom wanted to desecrate, where they even rejected the offer of Lot to let them rape his two virgin daughters instead of the two angels? (Genesis 19:4-8) John Chrysostom speculated³²⁴ that the visitors appeared as young men.

Ephraim the Syrian also stated³²⁵ that Abraham didn’t recognize the three visitors immediately, but mentioned that Abraham was expecting something. When he was 99 years old (Genesis 17:1), God had appeared to him; God then promised that his wife, Sarah, would have a son (Genesis 17:15-17). It was shortly after this³²⁶ that the Lord and the two angels appeared to him. Abraham quickly recognized the strangers as the Lord with two angels, and he fell down and worshipped Him (Genesis 18:2).

Justin Martyr confirmed³²⁷ that the person who appeared to Abraham was Christ, accompanied by two angels. He appeared on earth “in human form” in like manner as the two angels who came with Him.

“Moses, the blessed and faithful servant of God, declares that He who appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre is God, sent with the two angels in His company to judge Sodom by Another. The other, who remains ever in the supercelestial places, invisible to all men, holds personal intercourse with none, whom we believe to be Maker and Father of all things”.

“I have proved to you (Trypho) from the Scriptures that one of those three is God, and is called Angel, because He brings messages to those to whom God the Maker of all things wishes messages to be brought. In regard to Him who

³²³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, XLI, 13-15.

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, XLIII, 3.

³²⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, XLI, 13.

³²⁵ Ephraim the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, XIV:2-XV:2.

³²⁶ We can see that this was shortly after the first visit. At the earlier visit, the Lord hadn’t said when Sarah would have a son. During the second visit, the Lord said that He would return in a year and that Sarah would then have her son (Genesis 18:9-11). When the Lord returned a year later, Isaac had been born when Abraham was 100 years old (Genesis 21:5). Given the normal 9 months for Sarah’s pregnancy, the second visit had to be no more than a few months after the first.

³²⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 56.

appeared to Abraham on earth in human form in like manner as the two angels who came with Him, and who was God even before the creation of the world, it was reasonable for you to believe this”.

Irenaeus described³²⁸ Christ’s appearance to Abraham as one of speaking to him “in human shape”.

“Therefore the Jews have departed from God, in not receiving His Word, but imagining that they could know the Father apart, by Himself, without the Word; that is, without the Son. They are ignorant of that God who spoke in human shape to Abraham, and again to Moses, saying, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people in Egypt, and I have come down to deliver them.” For the Son, who is the Word of God, arranged these things beforehand from the beginning in order that He might call the creation into being, and form man, for whom also the creation was made”.

Tertullian also pointed out³²⁹ that prior to the Incarnation, we cannot make a distinction between a visible and an invisible God, as the heretic Marcion did, since both the Father and the Son were invisible.

“The Scriptures call Christ ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1:15). We in like manner say that the Father of Christ is invisible, for we know that it was the Son who was seen in ancient times, whenever any appearance was granted to men in the name of God, as the image of the Father Himself. He must not be regarded, however, as making any difference between a visible and an invisible God. Long before he wrote this we find a description of our God to this effect, ‘No man can see the Lord, and live’” (Exodus 33:20).

Thus, there must have been some characteristic of the Presence of the Lord and His angels that tipped Abraham, Lot and Moses off as to who they were. Perhaps they glowed as Moses’ face did after he spoke with Christ on various occasions (Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 3:7-18). Perhaps they gave off an ethereal appearance. Whatever it was, there was something about them that was quickly recognizable as an other-worldly appearance.

In writing to Trypho, a Jew who thought that Abraham’s three visitors were angels, Justin Martyr stated³³⁰ that, while the visitors appeared in human form, the “eating” could very well have been figurative and not chewing and swallowing. Similarly, Justin stated that Christ wrestled³³¹ in human form with Jacob (Genesis 32:24-32), and called Himself “Captain” when He appeared³³² in human form to Joshua the son of Nun (Joshua 5:13-15).

“It is written that they ate; and we believe that the three ate, and not the two alone, where the two were really angels, and are nourished in the heavens. This is evident to us, since they are not nourished by food similar to that which mortals use. For, concerning the sustenance of manna which supported your fathers in the desert, Scripture speaks thus, that they ate angels’ food (Psalm 78:25). If we believe that three ate, then I would say that the Scripture, which

³²⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, vii, 4.

³²⁹ Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 5, 19.

³³⁰ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 57.

³³¹ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 58.

³³² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 61.

affirms they ate, bears the same meaning as when we would say about fire that it has devoured all things. Yet it is not certainly understood that they ate, masticating with teeth and jaws. So that not even here should we be at a loss about anything, if we are acquainted even slightly with figurative modes of expression, and able to rise above them.”

Marcion had contended that these appearances constituted a change in the Godhead, and that change is not possible to a Being who cannot come to an end. Therefore these appearances couldn't have been God. Tertullian stated³³³ that there was bodily substance to the appearances of Christ and His angels, but that this bodily substance appeared out of nothing, and returned to nothing afterward. Tertullian refuted Marcion's theory by referring to the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

“You have read that the Creator's angels have been changed into human form, and have even borne about so veritable a body that Abraham washed their feet, and Lot was rescued from the Sodomites by their hands. Has it been permitted to angels, after they have been changed into human bodily form, nevertheless to remain angels? Are you saying that Christ could not continue to be God, after His real assumption of the nature of man?”

“You are confuted in this matter by the Gospel of John, when it declares that the Spirit descended in the body of a dove, and sat on the Lord. When the Spirit was in this condition, He was as truly a dove as He was also a spirit. He did not destroy His own proper substance by the assumption of an extraneous substance. But, you ask, what became of the dove's body, after the return of the Spirit back to heaven, and similarly in the case of the angels. Their withdrawal was affected in the same manner as their appearance had been. If you had seen how their production out of nothing had been effected, you would have known also the process of their return to nothing. If the initial step was out of sight, so was also the final one. Still there was solidity in their bodily substance, whatever may have been the force by which the body became visible”.

Tertullian also stated³³⁴ that the many people that “saw God”, during the events recorded in the Old Testament, saw according to the faculties of men, but not according to the full glory of the Godhead. If Abraham³³⁵, Jacob, Isaiah and Ezekiel really “saw God”, yet did not die, then the Scripture misleads us when it says, ‘No man shall see My Face, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). In fact, they did not “see God” in all His Glory, but they saw Him through a glass, dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12), or enigmatically.

“When Moses in Egypt desired to see the face of the Lord, God said, ‘You cannot see My Face; for no man shall see My Face, and live’. In other words, he who sees me shall die. Now we find that many persons have seen God, and yet no one who saw Him died at the sight. The truth is, they saw God according to the faculties of men, but not in accordance with the full glory of the Godhead. The patriarchs are said to have seen God (Abraham and Jacob), and the prophets (for instance, Isaiah and Ezekiel), and yet they did not die. Either they ought to have died, since they had seen Him, or else if they saw God, and yet did not die,

³³³ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, II, v, 3.

³³⁴ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, II, vii, 14.

³³⁵ See for example Genesis 18:1-15, Genesis 32:24-30, Isaiah 6:1-13, Ezekiel 10:1-15.

the Scripture is false in stating that God said, ‘If a man see my face, he shall not live’”.

“Either way, the Scripture misleads us, when it makes God invisible, and at the same time, when it produces Him to our sight. Now, then, they must have seen a different Being, because one, who was seen, could not be invisible. It will therefore follow, that by Him who is invisible we must understand the Father in the fullness of His majesty, while we recognize the Son as visible. Similarly, we cannot contemplate the sun, in the full amount of his substance which is in the heavens, but we can only endure with our eyes a ray from him to the earth”.

“But the Scripture maintains their difference by the distinction it makes between the Visible and the Invisible. If it was the Son, who spoke to Moses, Praxeas must mean that His face was visible to no one, because He was Himself the invisible Father in the name of the Son. Praxeas states that the Visible and the Invisible are one and the same, just as the Father and the Son are the same. In a preceding passage, before He had refused the sight of His face to Moses, the Scripture informs us that ‘the Lord spoke face to face with Moses, even as a man speaks to his friend’ (Exodus 33:11). Just as Jacob also says, ‘I have seen God face to face’” (Genesis 32:30).

“We declare, however, that the Son also, considered in Himself as the Son, is invisible, in that He is God, and the Word and Spirit of God. He was visible before the days of His flesh, in the way that He spoke to Aaron and Miriam. ‘And if there shall be a prophet amongst you, I will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak to him in a dream. Not as with Moses, with whom I shall speak mouth to mouth, in truth, and not enigmatically’ (Numbers 12:6-8) that is to say, in image. The apostle also expresses it, ‘Now we see through a glass, dimly, or enigmatically, but then face to face’” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

What Did Moses See: A Vision or a Body?

So then, what exactly did Moses see? If God had not made Himself visible until the Incarnation, did Moses just behold a vision of what was to come? The consensus seems to be that Moses saw some kind of a vision, but that the vision had some bodily substance to it.

Jerome stated³³⁶ that the limiting factor in seeing God is the capacity of mortals to receive it. Even the pure in heart can’t do it.

“But if you think that God is seen by those who are pure in heart in this world, why did Moses afterwards entreat that he might see him distinctly? Because he said that he had seen God, the Lord told him, ‘You cannot see My face. Man shall not see My face, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). Wherefore also the Apostle calls Him the only invisible God, Who dwells in light unapproachable, and Whom no man has seen, nor can see (1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16). John testifies, saying, ‘No man has at any time seen God. The only begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him’” (John 1:18).

Basil stated³³⁷ that there is a special place, where we can “see” God, and it is a place of worship. It is not necessarily a physical place, but it is a place “in the Spirit”.

³³⁶ Jerome, *Against the Pelagians*, III, 12.

³³⁷ Basil, *On the Spirit*, XXVI, 62.

“It is an extraordinary statement, but it is none the less true, that the Spirit is frequently spoken of as the *place* of them that are being sanctified, and it will become evident that by this figure the Spirit is rather glorified. For words applicable to the body are, for the sake of clearness, frequently transferred in scripture to spiritual conceptions. Accordingly we find the Psalmist, even in reference to God, saying ‘Be You to me a champion God and a strong place to save me’ (Ps 31:2-3 LXX) and concerning the Spirit, ‘Behold there is place by me, and stand upon a rock’ (Exodus 33:21 LXX). Plainly meaning the place in the Spirit wherein, after Moses had entered, he was able to see God intelligibly manifested to him. This is the special and peculiar place of true worship. For it is said ‘Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burnt offerings in every place, but in the place the Lord your God shall choose’ (Deuteronomy 12:13-14). Now what is a spiritual burnt offering? ‘The sacrifice of praise’ (Ps 50:14 LXX)! In what place do we offer it? In the Holy Spirit! Where have we learned this? From the Lord himself in the words, ‘The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:21-24). This place Jacob saw and said, ‘The Lord is in this place’ (Genesis 28:16). It follows that the Spirit is truly the place of the saints and the saint is the proper place for the Spirit. The saint offers himself as he does for the indwelling of God, and is called God’s Temple” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Irenaeus stated³³⁸ that when Moses desired to see openly Him, Who had spoken with him, the vision from the cleft of the rock foretold the end times; i.e. the Transfiguration was the fulfillment of the promise to Moses to see God face to face. The prophets did not behold the actual face of God, but saw mysteries through which man should afterwards see God in the flesh. Christ in the flesh declared the Father with His brightness and His purpose.

“The Word spoke to Moses, appearing before him, ‘just as anyone might speak to his friend’ (Numbers 12:8). But Moses desired to see Him openly who was speaking with him, and was thus addressed, ‘Stand in the deep place of the rock, and with My Hand I will cover you. But when My splendor shall pass by, then you shall see My back parts, but My face you shall not see. For no man sees My face, and shall live’ (Exodus 33:20-23). Two facts are thus signified: that it is impossible for man to see God; and that, through the wisdom of God, man shall see Him in the last times, in the depth of a rock, that is, in His coming as a man. For this reason did the Lord confer with him face to face on the top of a mountain³³⁹, Elijah being also present (Matthew 17:1-9), He thus making good in the end the ancient promise”.

“The prophets, therefore, did not openly behold the actual face of God, but they saw the dispensations and the mysteries through which man should afterwards see God. He said to Elijah, ‘You shall go forth tomorrow, and stand in the presence of the Lord. And, behold, a wind great and strong, which shall tear up the mountains, and break the rocks in pieces before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a scarcely audible voice’ (1 Kings 19:11-12). By such means was the prophet, who was very indignant because of the transgression of the people

³³⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xx, 9-11.

³³⁹ I.e. at the Transfiguration, Matthew 17:1-9

and the slaughter of the prophets, both taught to act in a gentler manner. The Lord's advent as a man was pointed out, that it should be subsequent to that Law which was given by Moses, in which He would neither break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax (Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20). The mild and peaceful repose of His kingdom was indicated likewise. After the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, comes the tranquil and peaceful times of His kingdom, in which the spirit of God increases mankind in the gentlest manner. Ezekiel made this clearer still, that the prophets saw the dispensations of God in part, but not actually God Himself. He saw the vision of God (Ezekiel 1:1ff), and the cherubim, and their wheels, and had recounted the mystery of the whole progression. He beheld the likeness of a throne, and upon the throne a likeness as of the figure of a man, and his loins as the figure of amber, and what was below like the sight of fire. He set forth all the rest of the vision of the thrones; and lest any one might happen to think that in those visions he had actually seen God, he added, 'This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God'" (Ezekiel 2:1).

"Neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Ezekiel, who had all many celestial visions, saw God. What they did see were a similitude of the splendor of the Lord, and prophecies of things to come. It is clear that the Father is indeed invisible, of whom also the Lord said, 'No man has seen God at any time' (John 1:18). But His Word, as He Himself willed it, and for the benefit of those who beheld, showed the Father's brightness, and explained His purposes. As the Lord said, 'The only-begotten God, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him' (John 1:18). He also interprets the Word of the Father as being rich and great. Not in one figure, nor in one character, did He appear to those seeing Him, but according to the reasons and effects aimed at in His dispensations".

Carrying this discussion over to the Transfiguration, Tertullian continued to say³⁴⁰ that it was always the Son Who was visible while the Father was not visible. Christ said that He will speak face to face with Moses (LXX text). He was referring to the revealing of His glory on the mountain of the Transfiguration, where Moses and Elijah were present (Matthew 17:1-9).

"He reserves to some future time His presence and speech face to face with Moses, a promise which was afterwards fulfilled on the Mount of Transfiguration. When we read in the Gospel, 'Moses appeared talking with Jesus' (Luke 9:30-31), it is evident that in early times it was always in a glass, and an enigma, in vision and dream, that God, the Son, appeared — to the prophets and the patriarchs, as also to Moses himself. Even if the Lord did possibly speak with him face to face, yet it was not as man that he could behold His face, unless indeed it was in a glass, and by enigma. If the Lord so spoke with Moses, that Moses actually discerned His face, eye to eye, how did it come to pass that immediately afterwards, on the same occasion, he desires to see His face, which he ought not to have desired, because he had already seen it? How, in like manner, does the Lord also say that His face cannot be seen, because He had shown it. Or what is that face of God, the sight of which is refused, if there was one which was visible to man?"

³⁴⁰ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, II, vii, 14-15.

“Well, then, was the Son visible? Certainly not! He was the face of God only in vision and dream, and in a glass and enigma, because the Word and Spirit of God cannot be seen except in an imaginary form”.

“A like circumstance befell Peter, John, and James. They were unable to endure the glory of the Son, and if they saw the Father, they must have died then and there, ‘For no man shall see God, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). This being the case, it is evident that Christ was always seen from the beginning that became visible in the end. The Father, on the contrary, was not seen in the end, and had never been visible from the beginning. Accordingly there are two — the Visible and the Invisible. It was the Son, who was always seen, and the Son who always conversed with men, and the Son who has always worked by the authority and will of the Father. Because ‘the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do’ — ‘do’ that is, in His mind and thought. The Father acts by mind and thought; while the Son, who is in the Father’s mind and thought, gives effect and form to what He sees. Thus all things were made by the Son, and without Him nothing was made (John 1:3).

Ambrose of Milan spoke³⁴¹ of the Hand of God as referring to the Son of God and also to the Holy Spirit. Moses in the cleft of the rock was thus “In the Spirit” with the Son of God.

“We read that the Son is the Hand, for it is written, ‘Has not My Hand made all these things?’ (Isaiah 66:2) and elsewhere, ‘I will place you in the cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My Hand; I have placed My Hand under the covering of the rock’ (Exodus 33:21-22). This refers to the mystery of the Incarnation, because the eternal Power of God took on Itself the covering of a body. It is certainly clear that Scripture used the term hand both of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

“Again, since we read that the Spirit is the finger of God, we think that fingers, in the plural, are spoken of to signify the Son and Spirit. Lastly, that he may state that he received the sanctification both of the Son and of the Spirit, a certain saint says: ‘Your hands have made me and fashioned me’” (Psalm 119:73).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated³⁴² that creatures cannot either see or know God. Only the Son of God and the Spirit can do that.

“It is impossible for things originate either to see or to know God, for the sight and the knowledge of Him surpasses all. God Himself says, ‘No one shall see My face and live’ (Exodus 33:20). Yet the Son has declared, ‘No one knows the Father, except the Son’ (Matthew 11:27); therefore the Word is different from all things originate, in that He alone knows and alone sees the Father. As He says, ‘Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He that is from the Father,’ (John 6:46), though Arius thinks otherwise³⁴³. How then did He alone know,

³⁴¹ Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit*, III, v, 33-34.

³⁴² Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, xvi, 22.

³⁴³ Ambrose wrote of the arrogance and inflated ego of Arius as follows: “Moses was prevented from seeing the face of God; Arius merited seeing it in secret. Moses, who appeared with the Lord in glory, then saw only the back parts of God in appearance; Arius beholds God wholly face to face! Paul also speaks of inferior beings: ‘We know in part and we prophesy in part’ (1 Corinthians 13:9). Arius says: ‘I know God altogether and not in part’. Thus Paul is inferior to Arius, and the vessel of election knows in part, but the vessel of perdition knows wholly”. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, V, xix, 236-237.

except that He alone belonged to Him? How could He belong, if He were a creature, and not a true Son from Him?”

Tertullian wrote³⁴⁴ that Moses’ fasting and prayer was a prime reason for his close walk with God.

“He whose ‘heart’ was habitually found ‘lifted up’ rather than fattened up maintained a fast for forty days and as many nights, above the power of human nature, while spiritual faith ministered strength to his body. He both saw with his eyes God’s glory, and heard with his ears God’s voice, and understood with his heart God’s Law. God taught Moses even then, by experience, that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3). The People, though fatter than he, could not constantly contemplate even Moses himself, fed as he had been upon God, or his leanness, sated as it had been with God’s glory! Deservedly, therefore, even while in the flesh, did the Lord show Himself to him”.

John Chrysostom stated³⁴⁵ that “seeing God” and “knowing God” are related to knowledge of the Son of God. Philip tried to press Jesus on this issue, and was rebuked as trying to know the Father apart from the Son.

“Consider the exact meaning of the words, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and have you not known Me, Philip?’ Philip replied, ‘Are You the Father after whom I inquire?’ (John 14:8-9) ‘No’, He said. On this account He didn’t say, ‘have you not known Him’, but, ‘have you not known Me’, declaring that the Son is no other than what the Father is, yet continuing to be a Son. But how did Philip come to ask this question? Christ had said, ‘If you had known Me, you should have known My Father also’ (John 14:7), and He had often said the same to the Jews. Peter and the Jews had often asked Him, ‘Who is the Father?’ (John 5:16-47, 8:13-20). Thomas had asked Him (John 14:5-6), but no one had understood. Philip, in order that He might not seem to trouble Him by asking in turn after the Jews, added, ‘Show us the Father and it is sufficient for us’ (John 14:8). Yet Christ had said, “If you had known Me, you should have known My Father also’ (John 14:7), and by Himself He declared the Father. But Philip reversed the order, and said, ‘Show us the Father’, as though he knew Christ exactly. But Christ did not put up with him, but set him right, persuading him to gain the knowledge of the Father through Himself, while Philip desired to see Him with these bodily eyes, having perhaps heard concerning the Prophets, that they ‘saw God’. But those cases, Philip, were acts of condescension. Wherefore Christ said, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18); and again, ‘Every man that has heard and has learned from God comes to Me’ (John 6:45). ‘You have not heard His voice at any time and you have not seen His shape’ (John 5:37). In the Old Testament, ‘No man shall see My face, and live’ (Exodus 33:20). What did Christ say? Very reprovably He said, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and have you not known Me, Philip?’ He said not, ‘have you not seen Me’, but, ‘have you not known Me’”.

³⁴⁴ Tertullian, On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics, IV, viii, 6.

³⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIV, 1.

Leo the Great stated³⁴⁶ that one of the rewards of the age to come is the ability to see God face to face. This is what Paul said, “that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man”.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). Great is the happiness, beloved, of him for whom so great a reward is prepared. What, then, is it to have the heart pure, but to strive after those virtues which are mentioned above? How great the blessedness of seeing God, what mind can conceive, what tongue declare? Yet this shall come when man’s nature is transformed, so that no longer ‘in a mirror’, nor ‘in a riddle’, but ‘face to face’ (1 Corinthians 13:12) it sees the very Godhead ‘as He is’ (1 John 3:2), which no man could see (Exodus 33:20, John 1:18, 1 Timothy 6:16). Through the unspeakable joy of eternal contemplation we obtain that ‘which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man’ (Isaiah 64:4, 1 Corinthians 2:9). Rightly is this blessedness promised to purity of heart! The brightness of the true light will not be able to be seen by the unclean sight. That which will be happiness to minds that are bright and clean, will be a punishment to those that are stained”.

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2 "The Word of the Cross"

The “Word of the Cross” is a literal translation of Paul’s words (1 Corinthians 1:18), which is often mistranslated “the message of the Cross.” In Greek, the word *logos* is used, just as in, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). There are other Greek words that mean message, such as *rhema*: a message or matter, and *kerugma*: a message or proclamation. For example, while Peter was speaking to Cornelius (Acts 10:44), the text reads, “While Peter was still speaking this message (*rhema*), the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the Word (*logos*).” One can listen to a message (*rhema*) of this life, as the Apostles were commanded to proclaim (Acts 5:20), and not hear the Word, depending on the condition of one’s heart.

Thus, the Word of the Cross is not just a message; it is part of the fabric of Christianity. If one misses the Word, one misses God. If one misses the Word of the Cross, one misses God’s ways.

The word translated “foolishness” (Greek *moria* which comes from *moraino* meaning foolish or moronic) could also be translated “moronic behavior” and is the root of the English word “moron.” To many people who see only the world’s viewpoint, it may seem moronic that we put all our hope for life and being in the teachings of a crucified Jew!

The Chief Priests, Scribes and elders mocked Jesus on the Cross saying, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:42-43). How can it be reasonable that this crucified Jew is the answer to all the world’s problems?

³⁴⁶ Leo the Great, Sermons, XCV, 8.

John Chrysostom compared³⁴⁷ Christ on the Cross with the Three Young Men in the fire (Daniel 3:16-25) and with Jonah in the belly of the sea monster (Jonah 2).

“The Three Children avoiding the fire would not have been so astonishing as having entered and having trampled on the fire. For Jonah, it was a greater thing by far, after he had been swallowed by the sea monster, to suffer no harm from the monster, than if he had not been swallowed at all.” For Christ, “His remaining alive would not have been as inconceivable as having died, He should loose the bonds of death. He did not come down from the Cross for He was hastening on to close conflict with death himself. He descended not from the Cross, not because He could not, but because He would not”.

Those who are perishing do not understand this, and the problem is the disease of unbelief. As Chrysostom stated³⁴⁸:

“To the sick and gasping, even wholesome meats are unpleasant, friends and relatives are burdensome. Relatives are oftentimes not even recognized, but are rather accounted intruders. Much like this often is the case of those who are perishing in their souls. The things which tend to salvation they do not know; and those who are careful about them they consider to be troublesome. Now this ensues not from the nature of the thing, but from their disease. Just what the insane do, hating those who take care of them, and besides reviling them, the same is the case with unbelievers also. Be not troubled, therefore, for it is no strange nor unaccountable event; things truly great are mocked by those who are beside themselves”.

All this was a perfect illustration of what the Apostle Paul wrote about the “Word of the Cross”. The wisdom of the world was unwilling to discover God. Therefore Chrysostom said³⁴⁹ that

“God employed what seemed to be foolishness, i.e. the Gospel, to persuade men; not by reasoning but by faith. To believe on Him that was crucified and buried, and to be fully persuaded that this Person Himself both rose again and sat down on high; this did not need wisdom or reasoning, but faith. The Apostles themselves came in not by wisdom, but by faith, and surpassed the heathen wise men in wisdom and loftiness. This transcends all human understanding, since they were uneducated fishermen”.

For this reason, the traditional outreach of the Church has been to the poor, not to the rich and the wise.

This is what Paul meant by “destroying the wisdom of the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:19, Isaiah 29:14). Chrysostom continued³⁵⁰,

“The wise are not profited at all by wisdom, and the unlearned are not injured at all by ignorance. For the shepherd and the rustic will more quickly receive this, repressing all doubting thoughts and delivering himself to the Lord. In this way then, He destroyed wisdom”.

³⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 3.

³⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 1.

³⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

³⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

Similarly He “made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1 Corinthians 1:20). Chrysostom stated³⁵¹ it this way,

“He has shown wisdom to be foolish in regards to receiving the faith. Since they prided themselves on it, He lost no time in exposing it. What sort of wisdom is it, when it cannot discover the chief things that are good?”

Second Parable from the Old Testament: Job 42:12-17 "Blessings for Job's Faithfulness"

And the Lord blessed the latter end of Job, *more* than the beginning: and his cattle were fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, a thousand she-asses of the pastures. And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters. And he called the first Jemimah, and the second Keziah, and the third Keren-Happuch. And there were not found in comparison with the daughters of Job, fairer *women* than they in all the world: and their father gave them an inheritance among their brethren. And Job lived after *his* affliction a hundred and seventy years³⁵²; and all the years he lived were two hundred and forty; and Job saw his sons and his sons' sons, the fourth generation. And Job died, an old man and full of days; and it is written that he will rise again with those whom the Lord raises up. This man is described in the Syriac book *as* living in the land of Ausis³⁵³ (Greek: *Ausitidi*), on the borders of Idumea and Arabia. And his name before was Jobab; and having taken an Arabian wife, he begot a son whose name was Ennon (Hebrew *Anub*). And he himself was the son of his father Zerah, one of the sons of Esau, and of his mother Basemath (Genesis 36:9-14), so that he was the fifth from Abraham. And these were the kings who reigned in Edom, which country he also ruled over. First, Bala, the son of Beor³⁵⁴, and the name of his city was Dinhabah (probably the same as the Hebrew name *Dibon*, which was due East of the Dead Sea); but after Bala, Jobab, who is called Job³⁵⁵, and after him Husham, who was governor out of the country of Teman³⁵⁶. And after him Hadad, the son of Bedad, who destroyed Midian in the plain of Moab; and the name of his city was Avith (perhaps the same as the Hebrew name *Ar*, which was near *Dibon*). And *his* friends who came to him were Eliphaz, of the children of Esau, king of the Temanites, Bilhad sovereign the Shuhites, Zephan king of the Mineans, or Naamathites” (Job 42:12-17 LXX).

Brief history of the life of Job

Job was a descendant of Esau and he lived in Mt. Seir (Genesis 36:1-8), on the borders of Idumea and Arabia (Job 42:17), Southeast of the Dead Sea, during the years that Israel was in Egypt. According to tradition³⁵⁷, after the death of his father, Zerah, Job traveled to Egypt to marry Rahme³⁵⁸, the daughter of Ephraim and granddaughter of Joseph, who was second in

³⁵¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, IV, 4.

³⁵² The Hebrew manuscripts state that Job lived 140 years after his affliction.

³⁵³ This town must have been located somewhere in Edom.

³⁵⁴ A later descendant of Beor was the prophet Balaam, who incited God against Israel during the Exodus (Numbers 22-24, Revelation 2:15).

³⁵⁵ Thus Job (or Jobab), who ruled in Edom after Bala, lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. This explains why Job's friends, who initiated the inquisition against him, were the kings of neighboring territories.

³⁵⁶ Teman was the Southern portion of Idumaea.

³⁵⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, v. 4, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1996, p. 708.

³⁵⁸ We may presume that he had met Rahme and Joseph (Genesis 50:23) in traveling to Egypt to buy food, as many people had to do (Genesis 42:5).

command to Pharaoh. It was Rahme who had inherited Joseph's "Robe of Beauty" (Genesis 37:3) that Jacob had made for him. After returning to his home country, Job became a prophet to his countrymen, and was later the governor of that region. Israel passed by Mt. Seir³⁵⁹ during the Conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 2:4-6), where the descendants of Esau still lived.

Job's ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth, "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8). In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness. Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children, consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, he would curse God to His face (Job 1:11).

Satan recognized Job's godliness, just as he recognized that of Christ (Matthew 4:1-10). Yet Satan felt that all Job's righteousness could be attributed to the Lord's physical blessings in his life. Satan didn't allow for the possibility that Job would actually *want* to love God. So the Lord allowed Satan to take away all Job's possessions in sifting him.

The way this happened is first the Sabeans³⁶⁰ attacked and took all Job's oxen and donkeys, killing Job's herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, fire fell from heaven and burned up all the sheep, killing the shepherds with the sheep (Job 1:16). Third, the Chaldean raiders came and took all Job's camels, killing the keepers who were defending. Lastly, while Job's children were having a feast at the house of the oldest son "on his day" (probably his birthday, Job 1:4) a great wind (perhaps a tornado) came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Today's insurance industry would refer to the second and fourth as "acts of God" even though their source is an act of Satan.

Job's response to all this was to prepare himself to worship the Lord saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Meanwhile, the Lord pointed out to Satan that Job held fast to his integrity "even though you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause" (Job 2:3). When the Lord pointed out Job's righteousness, Satan challenged the Lord's judgment (Job 2:3-5). Satan was allowed to afflict Job with every evil imaginable (Job 1:13-19, 2:7-13). Yet Job's words were "Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

John Chrysostom stated³⁶¹, "If you give thanks when you are in comfort and in affluence, in success and in prosperity, there is nothing great, nothing wonderful in that. Compare this to a man giving thanks when he is in afflictions, in anguish, in discouragement". As an example, one might recall Paul and Silas, broken and bleeding and sitting in a Philippian jail, but praying and singing hymns to God – at midnight (Acts 16:23-25).

³⁵⁹ In Arab tradition, all the territory around Mt. Seir is still referred to as the "Land of Job". Job's tomb is located near the town of Nawa. The growth of legends has probably increased the boundaries of the "Land of Job", but this enduring tradition attests to the extraordinarily charismatic character of Job himself. For details of this, see Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, v. 4, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1996, p. 708-715.

³⁶⁰ This is the Kingdom of Sheba (the Sabeans), from which the Queen of Sheba came (1 Kings 10:4). Their territory approximates what is Yemen today. The LXX translates "Sabeans" as spoilers.

³⁶¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX.

In the life of Job, there was a larger event that was taking place: the building of Job's faith, and the proving to Satan that he is impotent in overthrowing the things God has established. The same is true in our lives.

The next "messengers from Satan" (compare 2 Corinthians 12:7) was a severe physical one: skin boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:7). Now destitute and unable to afford any medical attention, Job's only medical alternative was scrapping the pus off his skin with a piece of broken pottery. Completely disfigured by these diseases, Job's wife advised him: "Just say some word against the Lord, and die!" (Job 2:9 LXX). When three of his friends (kings from other countries) came to see him after hearing of his adversity, they didn't even recognize him at first because of his disfigurement. When they did, they openly wept (Job 2:11-12 LXX). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his affliction was dreadful and very great (Job 2:13 LXX). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

After the seven days of silence came the last messenger: the inquisition. Job's three friends thought that Job had some secret sin that brought all this evil down on his own head. Eliphaz, king of the Temanites³⁶², suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. When can he remember the pure in heart ever being utterly destroyed? (Job 4:7-8 LXX). Bilhad, sovereign of the Shuhites³⁶³, suggested that perhaps Job's sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job were pure and true, God would listen to his supplication, and would restore to him the habitation of righteousness. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor will he receive any gift of the ungodly (Job 8:4, 6, 20 LXX). Job claimed he was innocent. Zophar, king of the Mineans³⁶⁴, suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. "If you have made your heart pure and lifted up your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let unrighteousness lodge in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14 LXX). The effect of all this on Job was that "the tents of the destroyers prosper while the just and blameless man is a joke (Job 12:4, 6). If Job had been a prophet to his countrymen, this would explain why he was sought out by the kings of neighboring countries.

Israel at this time consisted of just the extended family of Jacob (i.e. Israel), and they are all in Egypt. The above example of Job and his friends shows that the knowledge of God at this time was rather widespread, both to the North and South.

The result of this inquisition was perhaps the cruelest and the most difficult aspect of Job's misery to deal with. After all, there was ample evidence all around Job that it was true! Chrysostom commented³⁶⁵ that "the reproaches of Job's friends appeared more hurtful than the worms and the sores. There is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul". The message of the inquisition is exactly what Satan seeks to convince us of: that God is not faithful; that He doesn't care about us and that we should only trust in what we can see.

³⁶² Teman was the Southern portion of Idumaea.

³⁶³ The Shuhites were descendants of Shuah, the son of Abraham by Keturah. His descendants were an Arab tribe West of the Euphrates, 500 miles to the Northeast.

³⁶⁴ The Mineans were a province of the Kingdom of Sheba (the Sabaeans), from which the Queen of Sheba came (1 Kings 10:4). Their territory is in Yemen today, 700 miles to the South.

³⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.

Job was a forerunner for Christ regarding suffering and patience (James 5:10-11). He grew spiritually because of all the evil (the Cross) that he had to bear, and he was rewarded for his efforts both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:1-17).

Gregory the Theologian stated³⁶⁶ that all of Job's ordeal was for the revealing of his righteousness. This was also true of Christ's ordeal at the Cross.

“What then of Him who answered Job out of the whirlwind and cloud, Who is slow to chastise and swift to help, Who does not allow the rod of the wicked to come into the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous should learn iniquity? At the end of the contests He declares the victory of the athlete in a splendid proclamation and lays bare the secret of his calamities. ‘Do you think that I have dealt with you for any other purpose than the revealing of your righteousness?’ This is the balm for his wounds; this is the crown of the contest; this is the reward for his patience. Perhaps his subsequent prosperity was small, great as it may seem to some, and ordained for the sake of small minds, even though he received again twice as much as he had lost”.

Ezekiel referred to Job as a model of intercession for his people, along with Noah and Daniel. This is a result of Job's righteousness, where the Lord directed Job to intercede in prayer for his inquisitors and offer up sacrifices for them (Job 42:7-8). Similarly, Christ does the same for us (Hebrews 7:24-28). Ezekiel wrote:

“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, if a land shall sin against me by committing a trespass, then will I stretch out my hand upon it, and will break its staff of bread, and will send famine on it, and cut off from it man and beast. Though these three men should be in the midst of it, Noah, and Daniel, and Job, they *alone* should be delivered by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:13-14 LXX).

The reproaches that Job received from the Lord (Job 38:1-23) had to do with his limited understanding of the Godhead that had existed prior to Creation and that had created the world. The Lord never questioned Job's righteousness, and He said that what Job had spoken was right, and that his friends had not done so (Job 42:7-8). But Job still had to learn more about the majesty of God, as we all do. When Christ came as the ultimate intercessor, His Divinity was veiled by His flesh, and He didn't have the weakness in understanding God that Job had.

Job's Reward for His Righteousness

It was just after Job finished praying for his friends, those who had just finished their inquisition against him, that Job was rewarded for his faithfulness. This models Christ, who was also rewarded for His ordeal on the Cross and in the tomb (Philippians 2:5-11). Similarly God promised to the nation of Israel rewards after they went through the affliction of the Exile (Isaiah 61:7). Job's losses were restored to twice what he had before. All his brothers and sisters, who had distanced themselves from him during his ordeal, now came and feasted with him, rejoicing in his new-found prosperity (Job 42:10-11). Job did not reject them, even though they had

³⁶⁶ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration On the Great Athanasius, XXI, 18.

considered him to be forsaken of God during his ordeal. Understanding his situation no longer required faith, so it was easy for them to rejoice with him.

In describing Job's rewards, four different animals are mentioned, where large numbers of these were a measure of wealth. Sheep were used for food and clothing (milk, cheese, wool), while oxen were used as "tractors" for plowing the fields and treading the grain at harvest. Female donkeys were used as "pickup trucks" for the transport of people and supplies to the fields, while camels were used as "large trucks" to carry heavy loads to the large cities and to the seaports.

Part of Job's rewards was an additional ten children, replacing the ones lost at the beginning of his suffering. These children were born to Job's second wife, an Arabian woman (Job 42:17 LXX), where we can presume that Job's first wife, Rahme, died of old age. Only one of his seven sons is mentioned, but his three daughters are mentioned by name as being outstanding. "And there were not found in comparison with the daughters of Job, fairer *women* than they in all the world; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brethren" (Job 42:15 LXX).

Job's daughters' names are Jemimah (from Arabic *jemame*, a dove), Keziah (from Hebrew cassia, meaning cinnamon) and Keren-Happuch (from Hebrew *Qeren Happuk* meaning a horn of antimony, used for makeup). Their names probably imply something about their beauty. Jemimah may have had innocent and attractive eyes like a dove. Keziah may have carried an appealing sense of smell like cinnamon. And Keren-Happuch may have had her beauty made more attractive by the use of makeup of some kind.

For Job to give them an inheritance along with their brothers indicates something outstanding about his daughters. It was customary for only a man's sons to have a share in his inheritance, not his daughters, since a daughter shared in her husband's inheritance. If a man had no sons, then his daughters might obtain his inheritance, but even this was not automatic, as was illustrated by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11). Because Job's sons did not object to the distribution of part of his inheritance to their sisters, one can surmise that the sons were not greedy and that there was considerable harmony within Job's family.

Job's blessing, where he saw his children's children to four generations, is another analogy to Christ, where Christ's "seed" is the Church. Isaiah spoke of how Christ would be despised (Isaiah 53:3), would be wounded for us (Isaiah 53:5) and would be slaughtered like a lamb (Isaiah 53:7). Following this, Isaiah said,

"He made His soul an offering for sin, after it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand" (Isaiah 53:10).

Discussions Moved to Other Good Friday Studies at the Various Hours of Prayer

The following Readings for Good Friday Vespers are covered elsewhere during the Holy Week Study:

1st Good Friday Vespers Gospel: Matthew 27:1-37 "The Crucifixion": 3rd Hour
2nd Good Friday Vespers Gospel: Luke 23:39-43 "One Thief Repented": 6th Hour
3rd Good Friday Vespers Gospel: Matthew 27:39-54 "Ridicule and Earthquake": 6th Hour
4th Good Friday Vespers Gospel: John 19:31-37 "The Breaking of the Legs": 9th Hour
3rd Parable from the Old Testament: Isaiah 52:13-54:1 "The Suffering Servant": 6th Hour

Good Friday Evening Lamentation *The Sealing of the Tomb*

12th Gospel: Matthew 27:62-66 “The Sealing of the Tomb”

This Reading is also used for Holy Saturday Matins.

To Jesus’ followers, the sealing of the tomb was the final blow to their hopes and dreams. They had recognized Him as Messiah, but they hadn’t understood that He had power over death itself. Their hopes of a Kingdom of God on earth had been thrown down and crushed, and the seal on the tomb was the epitaph.

The chief priests and Pharisees, or their representatives probably watched the embalming of Jesus’ body. Their concern was that Jesus had said that He would rise from the dead on the third day, and they were afraid that some of Jesus’ followers might steal His body in order to claim that He rose from the dead (Matthew 27:62-64).

Joseph, Nicodemus and their servants finished the burial rite by placing Jesus’ embalmed body in the tomb, and rolling the stone across the entrance. By the time they finished, it was probably already dark. Early the next morning, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered to Pontius Pilate to request a guard at the tomb. Pilate reminded them, “You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how” (Matthew 27:65). The “guard” that Pilate referred to was the detachment of soldiers that was assigned to security around the Temple. Included in this detachment was the Centurion named Longinus. After the Resurrection, this same “guard” immediately reported to the chief priests what had happened (Matthew 28:11), and not to Pilate or to the Roman authorities.

Besides setting the “guard”, which was a detachment of soldiers assigned 24 hours per day, they also “sealed the stone”. The seal was a wax seal on the stone with an impression of the seal of the chief priest, so that anyone could tell whether the stone was moved or disturbed. When Jesus rose from the dead, He rose right through the burial wrappings and right through the walls of the tomb, leaving the seal undisturbed. When the women came to the tomb early on the third day, the angel rolled back the stone and sat on it (Matthew 28:2) to demonstrate that Christ had already risen.

John Chrysostom stated³⁶⁷ that Joseph and Nicodemus were very rushed in performing the burial rite for Jesus, but that there were distinct advantages as a result in confirming the Resurrection.

“They were rushed by the time, since the Death took place at the ninth hour, and it is probable, that what with going to Pilate and what with taking down the body, evening would come upon them when it was not lawful to work. Therefore they laid Him in the tomb that was nearby. Christ being placed in a new tomb was providentially ordered, for several reasons: (1) That some might not think His Resurrection was that of some other who lay in the tomb with Him. (2) That the disciples might be able easily to come and be spectators of what came to pass, because the place was near. (3) That His enemies should be witnesses of

³⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 4.

His burial, and not His disciples alone. For the placing seals on the tomb, and the soldiers watching it, were the actions of men testifying to the burial”.

“Christ earnestly desired that His death should be confessed³⁶⁸, no less than the Resurrection. Therefore also the disciples were very earnest about this, the showing that He died. The Resurrection would be confirmed by all succeeding time. But the Death, if at that time it had been partially concealed, or not made very clear, was likely to harm the account of the Resurrection. Nor was it for these reasons only that He was laid nearby, but also that the story about the stealing (Matthew 27:62-66) might be proved false”.

1st Epistle: 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 "Christ Our Passover"

The first “Passover” occurred in Egypt in c. 1500 BC. On the 14th day of Nisan (March-April), in the mid to late afternoon (about 3:00 p.m.), the Passover lamb (male, without blemish) was killed. Its blood was to be applied to the side and upper door posts of the house where the given family lived, and where they would later eat the roasted meat of the lamb (Exodus 12:6, 7, 22). In applying the blood as commanded, they couldn’t help but trace out the outline of a cross.

Each family could obey God’s command and accept the blood “as a token upon the houses” where they lived, or reject the blood and disobey His command. The Lord said: “I will go through the land of Egypt on that night and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments -- I am the Lord. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12-13).

As is apparent from this quote, the “Lord’s Passover” is so called because the Lord “passed over” the houses when He saw the blood, such that the house was delivered from death.

On the 14th of Nisan, 30 AD, Jesus cried out, gave up the spirit, and died on the Cross (Mark 15:34-37). Precisely at this time, there was something happening at the Temple. According to the instruction in the books of Moses, the Passover Lamb was being slain in Jerusalem. As Jesus was dying, so was the Passover Lamb! This was what John the Baptist was talking about when he said, referring to Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

There are many aspects to the term “Christ our Passover”, and a detailed study of all the imagery is included in the Study for Holy Thursday Matins. The aspect that we will pursue here is the theme leading up to Holy Saturday, where Christ descended into Hell to conquer death and Hades.

When Paul spoke of “Christ, our Passover”, he was referring to the entire Paschal celebration, which lasted for a week, and not to just the Day of the Lord’s Passover, celebrated on the 14th of Nisan. Paul said, in the words of the Epistle,

³⁶⁸ One of the heresies promoted by early heretics, like Simon Magus and his followers, was the claim that Christ didn’t really die on the Cross, but only appeared to do so. For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

“Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

One aspect of Christ in the tomb was the preparation that He was making for us to become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. To understand this, it is instructive to take a look at a problem with this, which Paul spoke of in the chapter following the Epistle text.

Paul began 1 Corinthians by referring to something he stated on his first visit to Corinth regarding the Mosaic Law. Paul’s first visit (Acts 18) on his second missionary journey, came a year or so after the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul and Silas delivered to all the Churches a decree that was drafted by James and the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:22-29, 16:4). This decree stated that the Gentiles did not have to observe all the rituals of the Mosaic Law, but said the Gentiles will do well to stay away from three things:

idol sacrifices
blood and things containing blood
fornication (Greek: <i>porneia</i>)

Over the next three years, a libertine group³⁶⁹ had taken the decrees from Jerusalem and Paul’s teaching way beyond its intent. Their catch-words were:

foods are for the belly	the belly is for foods
fornication (<i>porneia</i>) is for the body	the body is for fornication

They saw no negative connections with this and they thought that both food and sex were necessary for the body. [The Greek word *porneia* is a general term and includes adultery, fornication and incest.]

Paul’s answer was threefold. First, he said he will not be ruled by anything (food, fornication, etc.). This is why we fast during Lent, Advent, etc., to begin to break the rule foods have on our bellies.

Second, Paul said the Lord would render both the belly and foods (1 Corinthians 6:13) completely idle³⁷⁰. What Paul is saying is that we won’t need food to fill our belly after His return. We can if we want to just as Jesus did in His newly resurrected body (Luke 24:40-43). Since our resurrected bodies will be similar to His, we won’t need to eat either.

³⁶⁹ This libertine group has all the characteristics of the teachings of Simon Magus. For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, Unpublished Work, 2002.

³⁷⁰ The Greek word *katargeo* does not mean to destroy as in pillage, but to render idle. For example, it is sometimes translated as “released” (Romans 7:2); and at other times as “abolished” (2 Timothy 1:10).

The third aspect of Paul's answer concerns the proper use of our bodies. Instead of the body for fornication, Paul said the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body (1 Corinthians 6:13). Speaking of union with Christ, Paul stated that our bodies are limbs³⁷¹ of Christ. Shall we take the limbs of Christ and make them limbs of a harlot (*porne*)? No way!

On the one hand, one who is joined³⁷² to a harlot is one body with her (1 Corinthians 6:16). On the other hand, one who is joined or "glued" (*kollao*) to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17).

John Chrysostom amplified³⁷³ the sin of fornication by comparing it to immersion in sewage.

"In fornication the entire body becomes defiled. It is polluted as if it had fallen into a vessel of sewage, and been immersed in defilement. Coming from covetousness and extortion no one hurries to take a bath, but as if nothing had happened returns to his house. Whereas coming from intercourse with a harlot, as having become altogether unclean, he goes to a bath first. To such a degree does the conscience retain from this sin a kind of sense of unusual shame".

Chrysostom stated³⁷⁴ that the contrasting condition of closeness to God is illustrated by the events surrounding Pascha.

"The Paschal Feast does not consist in pleasant conversation at meals, splendor of clothing (1 Timothy 2:9), or days of leisure, although we may do these things. But it consists in the acknowledgment of God, and the offering of thanksgiving and of praise to Him (1 Corinthians 6:20). Now this belongs to the saints alone, who live in Christ; for it is written, 'The dead shall not praise You, O Lord, neither all those who go down into silence; but we who live will bless the Lord, from henceforth even forever' (Psalm 115:17-18). So was it with Hezekiah, who was delivered from death, and therefore praised God, saying, 'Those who are in Hades cannot praise You; the dead cannot bless You; but the living shall bless You, as I also do' (Isaiah 38:18 LXX). To praise and bless God belongs to those only who live in Christ, and by means of this they go up to the Feast. The Passover is not of the Gentiles, or of those who are yet Jews in the flesh; but of those who acknowledge the truth in Christ, as he declares who was sent to proclaim such a Feast, 'Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed'" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Thus our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit in us. If we are joined or glued to the Lord, this follows logically. Thus we are not our own (or of ourselves alone). We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20); where the price was Jesus' death on the Cross, and the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Chrysostom pointed out³⁷⁵ that this settles us "in a state of security against sin, and against following the improper desires of the mind. We have many improper wishes, but we

³⁷¹ Greek: *melos*: members or parts of a body.

³⁷² Greek: *kollao* "glued" or "stuck together"

³⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XVIII, 2.

³⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, Festal Letters, VII, 2-3.

³⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XVIII, 3.

must repress them, for we can. If we could not, Paul's exhortation would be in vain." We are not our own; we have been bought with a price and we have a Master.

Eating the Passover Lamb

The Passover lamb, an unblemished male, was to be slain at twilight and its blood was to be applied to the door posts and the lintel (i.e. the top support of the doorframe). The application of the blood using a branch of hyssop traced the outline of the cross. With the blood on their doors, they would be passed-over when the Lord passed through and struck the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:13). All this was done to show how Christ, as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36) would be sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Eating the Passover lamb was the first thing the Israelis did once the Passover Lamb's blood had been shed, and it is the first thing the believer does once he accepts God's pardon. God's pardon is the blood on the door post. It is given by God and is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8, Romans 5:15-19), and it is both a necessary and sufficient condition for God to pass over the believer, delivering him from death (Romans 5:9).

Jesus Christ is the Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7, John 1:29). He stated that a person needs to eat His flesh in order to avoid death (John 6:49-51). It is important that the believer do this right away. Because just as the Israelis needed some substantial nourishment to carry them in their journey out of Egypt, so the believer needs some real "meat" for strength to get him "on his feet" and out of his bondage. Applying what Jesus said about this, He also said, "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). In other words, the "eating" is with one's heart, and the "digesting" is with one's mind.

As the Lamb (Jesus Christ) is "eaten" (accepted, received) and "digested" (understood, sorted out), something different becomes apparent. If the believer has the eyes to see, he can see his new Lord and Master begin to lead him, authoritatively, decisively away from his bondage toward the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that is, the Kingdom of God. Usually, there is a real excitement, rejoicing, and anticipation in a new believer's life around this time as he first sees "the movement of the pillar and the cloud," which is the presence of God directing his life.

We ask for the same assistance from the Lord all our lives. For example, in both "The Evening Prayer" at Vespers and in "The Great Doxology" at Matins, we say:

1. Blessed are You, O Lord, teach me Your statutes.
2. Blessed are You, O Sovereign, let me understand Your statutes.
3. Blessed are You, O Holy One, enlighten me with Your statutes.

There is a progression here in our understanding of the things of God as we are first taught, then we understand, and finally we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Note that Paul mentions that, "Our fathers were under the cloud, and were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1). The cloud was out in front leading the way, yet they were "under" the authority of the cloud just as the new believer is now "under" the

authority of his Lord. As they were baptized into Moses³⁷⁶, the new believer is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (along with the Father and the Spirit).

Israel was commanded to eat the Passover lamb with their loins girded, with their sandals on their feet, with their staff in their hand (Exodus 12:11). John Chrysostom stated³⁷⁷ that we also look for our Exodus, and we need to be ready. Assisting us are the same forces that assisted Israel in her Exodus, and opposing us are the same forces that opposed them.

“For why did they eat the Passover with their loins girded? They had, we read, their loins girded, their staff in their hands, their shoes on their feet, and thus they ate the Passover. These are awesome mysteries, and of vast depth; and if so awesome in the type, how much more in the reality? They came out of Egypt; they ate the Passover. Listen! ‘Our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ’ (1 Corinthians 5:7), it is said. Why did they have their loins girded? Their guise is that of wayfarers; for their having shoes and staves in their hands and their eating standing, declares nothing else than this. The Jews were continually forgetting God’s benefits to them. Accordingly then, God tied the sense of these, His benefits, not only to the time, but also to the very habit of them that were to eat. This is why they were to eat girded and sandaled, that when they were asked the reason, they might say, ‘we were ready for our journey, we were just about to go forth out of Egypt to the land of promise and we were ready for our exodus’. This then is the historical type. But the reality is this; we too eat a Passover, even Christ; ‘for’, says he, ‘our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ’ (1 Corinthians 5:7). We too ought to eat it, both sandaled and girded. Why? We eat that we too may be ready for our Exodus, for our departure”.

“Let not any one of them that eat this Passover look towards Egypt, but towards Heaven, towards ‘Jerusalem that is above’ (Galatians 4:26). On this account you eat with your loins girded, on this account you eat with shoes on your feet, that you may know, that from the moment you first begin to eat the Passover, you ought to set out, and to be upon your journey. This implies two things, both that we must depart out of Egypt, and that, while we stay, we must stay as in a strange country. ‘For our citizenship’, says he, ‘is in Heaven’ (Philippians 3:20); and that all our life long we should always be prepared. So that when we are called we may not put it off, but say, ‘My heart is fixed’. (Psalm 108:1). To be girded is the part of a waking soul; listen to what God says to that righteous man, ‘Gird up your loins like a man, for I will ask you, and you answer Me’ (Job 38:3). This He says also to all the prophets and this He says again to Moses, to be girded. He Himself also appears to Ezekiel (Ezekiel 9:11 LXX) girded. The Angels, too, appear to us girded (Revelation 15:6), as being soldiers. We also are going to depart, and many are the difficulties that intervene. When we have crossed this plain, immediately the devil is upon us, doing everything, contriving every artifice. To the end that those who have been saved out of Egypt, those who have passed the Red Sea, those who are delivered at once from the evil demons, and from unnumbered plagues, may be taken and destroyed by him. But, if we are vigilant, we too have a pillar of fire, the grace of the Spirit. The same both enlightens and overshadows us. We have manna, yea rather not manna, but far more than manna. For spiritual drink, we have more than water that springs

³⁷⁶ Moses being the head of the Israeli nation is often representative of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church.

³⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXIII, v. 14.

from the Rock. So we also have our encampment (Revelation 20:9), and we dwell in the desert right now; for a desert indeed without virtue, is the earth now, even more desolate than that wilderness. Why was that desert so terrible? Was it not because it had scorpions in it, and adders (Deuteronomy 8:15)? ‘A land’, it is said, ‘which none passed through’ (Jeremiah 2:6). Yet that wilderness is not so barren of fruits as is this human nature. At this instant, how many scorpions, how many asps are in this wilderness, how many serpents, how many ‘offspring of vipers’ (Matthew 3:7) are these through whom we at this instant pass! Yet let us not be afraid; for the leader of this our Exodus is not Moses, but Jesus”.

Gregory the Theologian added³⁷⁸ to this aspect of eating the Passover with one’s loins girded, saying that the purification must take hold of the reins of our life.

“And what of the loins, or reins, for we must not pass these over? Let the purification take hold of these also. Let our loins be girded and kept in check by continence, as the Law required for Israel of old, when partaking of the Passover! (Exodus 12:11) No one comes out of Egypt easily, or escapes the Destroyer, except he who has disciplined these. Let the reins be changed by that good conversion by which they transfer all the affections to God. So that they can say, Lord, all my desire is before You (Psalm 38:9), and the day of man have I not desired. For you must be a man of desires (Daniel 10:11), but the desires must be those of the spirit”.

Eating the Unleavened Bread

According to the Law, unleavened bread was to be eaten throughout each of the seven days of the feast (Exodus 12:14-15). Anyone eating something leavened was to be cut off from the nation of Israel! From the seriousness of the penalty of eating leavened foodstuffs, one can see that eating unleavened bread is the *central issue* of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Anyone who did not wish to comply was, in effect, saying that they did not want to partake of the things of the Kingdom of God. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul mentioned that the “old leaven” which was to be cleaned out of one’s dwelling (Exodus 12:19), which is one’s life or one’s heart, is “malice and wickedness”, whereas the unleavened bread of the feast is “sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8). Regarding this, John Chrysostom stated³⁷⁹,

“When we have driven away lying, bitterness, fornication, uncleanness and covetousness from our souls; when we have become kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another; when we have rendered ourselves worthy of it; what is there to hinder the Holy Spirit from coming and lighting upon us? Not only will He come to us, but He will fill our hearts, and when we have so great a light kindled within us, then will the way of virtue be no longer difficult to attain, but will be easy and simple”.

Paul stated that all sins except fornication are outside the body. Fornication however, is a sin against one’s own body because the Holy Spirit dwells there. Thus Paul said to glorify God in our bodies. One way he said to do this is to “present our bodies as a living, holy sacrifice, well pleasing to God, our reasonable worship” (Romans 12:1).

³⁷⁸ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 40 on Holy Baptism, XL

³⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX, v. 17.

For those who are unwilling to be transformed but insist on joining their body to a harlot, the Lord has no choice but to give them over in the desires or passions of their heart to uncleanness. Thus their bodies might be dishonored (i.e. abused and maltreated) among them (Romans 1:24). This is what happened to the Prodigal Son in his desire to separate himself from his father (Luke 15:11-32).

Eating unleavened bread during the Feast also speaks of separation and purification. This was the time of leaving behind bondage and slavery in Egypt. Purification is also understood in that unleavened bread (pure, without germ or leaven) is eaten throughout the Feast.

Athanasius stated³⁸⁰ that the Feast is an eternal and a heavenly Feast, not in shadows, but in truth. And we should treat it and prepare for it accordingly.

“Blessed Moses ordained the great feast of the Passover, and our celebration of it, because Pharaoh was killed, and the people were delivered from bondage. In those times, when those who tyrannized the people had been slain, temporal feasts and holidays were observed in Judea (Esther 9:20-28, Judith 9:15). Now that the devil, that tyrant against the whole world, is slain, we do not approach a temporal feast, my beloved, but an eternal and heavenly. Not in shadows do we show it forth, but we come to it in truth. They were filled with the flesh of a dumb lamb, accomplished the feast, and having anointed their doorposts with the blood, implored aid against the destroyer. But now we, eating of the Word of the Father, and having the lintels of our hearts sealed with the blood of the New Testament (Matthew 26:28), acknowledge the grace given us from the Savior. He said, ‘Behold, I have given to you to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy’ (Luke 10:19). No more does death reign; but instead of death we have life, since our Lord said, ‘I am the life’ (John 14:6). Everything is filled with joy and gladness; as it is written, ‘The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice’ (Psalm 97:1). When death reigned, ‘sitting down by the rivers of Babylon, we wept’ (Psalm 137:1) and mourned, because we felt the bitterness of captivity. But now that death and the kingdom of the devil is abolished, everything is entirely filled with joy and gladness. God is no longer known only in Judea, but in all the earth. ‘Their voice has gone forth, and the knowledge of Him has filled all the earth’ (Psalm 76:1, 19:4). What follows, my beloved, is obvious; that we should approach such a feast, not with filthy garments, but having clothed our minds with pure garments. We need in this to put on our Lord Jesus, that we may be able to celebrate the feast with Him. Now we are clothed with Him when we love virtue and are enemies to wickedness; when we exercise ourselves in temperance and mortify lasciviousness. Also when we love righteousness before iniquity; when we honor sufficiency and have strength of mind; when we do not forget the poor but open our doors to all men; when we assist humble-mindedness but hate pride”.

Athanasius continued³⁸¹ to link the ancient Passover to the Church.

“The Passover is indeed abstinence from evil for exercise of virtue, and a departure from death to life. This may be learned even from the type of old time. Then they worked hard to pass from Egypt to Jerusalem, but now we depart from

³⁸⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letter IV, 2-3.

³⁸¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letter V, 4.

death to life. They then passed from Pharaoh to Moses, but now we rise from the devil to Christ. At that time, the type of deliverance bore witness every year, so now we commemorate our salvation. We fast meditating on death that we may be able to live. We watch, not as mourners, but as they that wait for the Lord, when He shall have returned from the wedding, so that we may vie with each other in the triumph, hastening to announce the sign of victory over death”.

Athanasius also linked³⁸² the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord’s Table, and for those who approach unworthily, it is a danger and a reproach. However, those who draw near to the divine Lamb, touch heavenly food.

“There is no one free from defilement, though his course may have been but one hour on the earth (Job 14:4 LXX), as Job, that man of surpassing fortitude, testifies. But, ‘stretching forth to those things that are to come’ (Philippians 3:13), let us pray that we may not eat the Passover unworthily, lest we be exposed to dangers. To those who keep the feast in purity, the Passover is heavenly food; but to those who observe it profanely and contemptuously, it is a danger and reproach. It is written, ‘Whoever shall eat and drink unworthily, is guilty of the death of our Lord’ (1 Corinthians 11:27). Therefore, let us not merely proceed to perform the festal rites, but let us be prepared to draw near to the divine Lamb, and to touch heavenly food. Let us cleanse our hands; let us purify the body. Let us keep our whole mind from guile; not giving up ourselves to excess and to lusts, but occupying ourselves entirely with our Lord, and with divine doctrines; so that, being altogether pure (2 Peter 1:4), we may be able to partake of the Word”.

In one word, then, the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures separation from an old life of a bondage to sin and various wickedness, and the beginning of a life of real righteousness, having been purified from former sins (2 Peter 1:9).

The number seven is generally recognized as representing perfection or completion. Eating unleavened bread for seven days would then represent a complete separation from the old life of bondage and its power. This separation is illustrated very dramatically in the inundation of the armies of Pharaoh at the Red Sea³⁸³. Baptism in water makes a fitting conclusion to this “feast of separation” in that it adds a harmonic note of completion to the seven days of sincerity and truth (Compare 1 Peter 3:21).

The believer who has come through this “Feast of Separation” has a unique standing among mankind. Jesus Christ, Himself the firstborn of creation (Colossians 1:15) makes a distinction between “Israel and Egypt” (Exodus 11:7); that is between His own and those of the world (John 10:1-16). Those who are His own are said to have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life (Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12-15, 21:27), and are referred to collectively as “the general assembly and church of firstborn ones who have been enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). As such, they represent the firstborn of mankind and are designated to be a kingdom of priests to God the Father (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6, 1 Peter 2:5,

³⁸² Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letter V, 5

³⁸³ According to tradition, the crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh’s army occurred on the 7th day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was later commemorated as a Sabbath. For more details, see the Study for Matins of Holy Thursday.

9). All this was made possible by Christ's death and resurrection, which is why we review this subject here.

Yet there is a mystery here that not all are granted the ability to see. Ambrose of Milan stated³⁸⁴ that the depth of the mystery was veiled by Moses, so that only those to whom it has been given might know the mystery of the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:11-12).

“All do not see the depths of the mysteries, for they were hid from the Levites, lest they should see who ought not to see, and they who cannot serve should take it up. Moses, indeed, saw the circumcision of the Spirit, but veiled it, so as to give circumcision only in an outward sign. He saw the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth; he saw the sufferings of the Lord, but he veiled the unleavened bread of truth in the material unleavened bread. He veiled the sufferings of the Lord in the sacrifice of a lamb or a calf”.

Athanasius continued³⁸⁵ to exhort his people, saying that some keep the Feast by just going through the motions. The Apostle Paul as well as Moses reproves them such that, by doing this, the Feast becomes just “a feast of the Jews” (John 6:4) and not the real Pascha.

“God, who brought Israel out of Egypt, at this time calls us to the Feast, saying by Moses, ‘Observe the month of new fruits, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God’ (Deuteronomy 16:1). By the prophet He said, ‘Keep your Feasts, O Judah; pay to the Lord your vows’ (Nahum 1:15). If then God Himself loves the Feast, and calls us to it, it is not right, my brethren, that it should be delayed, or observed carelessly. But with zeal we should come to it, so that having begun joyfully here, we may also receive a pledge of that heavenly Feast. If we diligently celebrate the Feast here, we shall doubtless receive the perfect joy which is in heaven, as the Lord says, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, that I will no longer eat it until it is fulfilled with you in the kingdom of God’ (Luke 22:15-16). Now we eat it if, understanding the reason of the Feast, and acknowledging the Deliverer, we conduct ourselves in accordance with His grace. As Paul said, ‘Keep the Feast, not with old leaven neither with the leaven of wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (1 Corinthians 5:8). The Lord died in those days, that we should no longer do the deeds of death. He gave His life that we might preserve our own life from the snares of the devil. What is most wonderful, the Word became flesh, that we should no longer live in the flesh, but in spirit should worship God, who is Spirit. He who is not so disposed, abuses the days, and does not keep the Feast. Like an unthankful person he finds e fault with the grace, and honors the days too much, while he does not supplicate the Lord, Who redeemed him. Though fancying that he keeps the Feast, let him by all means hear the Apostolic voice reproving him, ‘You observe days, and months, and times, and years; I fear lest I have labored among you in vain’ (Galatians 4:10-11). The Feast is not on account of the days; but for the Lord’s sake, who then suffered for us; we celebrate it, for ‘our Passover Christ, is sacrificed’ (1 Corinthians 5:7). Even as Moses, when teaching Israel not to consider the Feast as pertaining to the days, but to the Lord, said, ‘It is the Lord’s Passover’ (Exodus 12:11). To the Jews, when they thought they were keeping the Passover, because

³⁸⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy I, 50, 260.

³⁸⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letter VI, 1-3.

they persecuted the Lord, the Feast was useless. It no longer bore the name of the Lord, even according to their testimony. It was not the Passover of the Lord, but the Passover of the Jews (John 6:4). The Passover was named after the Jews, my brethren, because they denied the Lord of the Passover. On this account, the Lord, turning away His face from such a doctrine of theirs, said, ‘Your new moons and your Sabbaths My soul hates’ (Isaiah 1:14). So now, those who keep the Passover in like manner, the Lord again reproves, as He did those lepers that were cleansed (Luke 17:15ff). He loved the one as thankful, but was angry with the others as ungrateful, because they did not acknowledge their Deliverer, but thought more of the cure of the leprosy than of Him who healed them”.

3rd Parable from Holy Saturday: Exodus 12:1-11 "Christ -- The Passover Sacrifice "

This Reading is read on Holy Saturday, but it is being covered here for the purpose of continuity of subject matter. The Reading describes the “Passover” event in Egypt of c. 1500 BC. On the 14th day of Nisan, in mid to late afternoon (about 3:00 p.m.), the Passover lamb (male, without blemish) was killed. Its blood was applied to the side and upper doorposts of the house where the given family lived, and where they would later eat the roasted meat of the lamb (Exodus 12:6, 7, 22). In applying the blood as commanded, they couldn’t help but trace the outline of a cross.

God responded to this. If the given household obeyed His command and accepted the blood “as a token upon the houses” where they lived, they were saved. If they rejected the blood, disobeyed His command, and decided they could make it quite well apart from His way, they weren’t. The Lord said: “I will go through the land of Egypt on that night and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments -- I am the Lord. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12-13).

Thus it is called the “Lord’s Passover” because the Lord “passed over” the houses when He saw the blood, such that the house was delivered from death.

In c. 30 AD, at the same time that the Passover Lamb was being slain ceremonially at the Temple in response to the Lord’s command, Jesus cried out, gave up the spirit, and died on the Cross (Mark 15:34-37). As Jesus was dying, so was the Passover Lamb! This was what John the Baptist was talking about when he said, referring to Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The people present at the ceremonial slaying of the Passover Lamb at the Temple were hindered by the darkness and they could feel the earthquake. They may even have been able to hear Jesus crying out with a loud voice giving up His spirit. To understand that the events were connected was not a stretch at all.

The prophetic significance of the celebration of the Lord’s Passover was simply that for almost 1500 years, from the Exodus to 30 AD, the fact that Jesus would die as the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world was celebrated in advance.

Justin Martyr explained³⁸⁶ the prophetic significance of the Passover as portraying Christ. Roasting portrays crucifixion, and the Paschal Lamb was affixed to a spit that formed the shape of a cross.

“The mystery of the lamb which God enjoined to be sacrificed as the Passover, was a type of Christ; with whose blood, in proportion to their faith in Him, they anointed their houses, i.e., themselves, who believe on Him. The creation, which God created, namely Adam, was a house for the spirit, which proceeded from God. This injunction was temporary, however. God does not permit the lamb of the Passover to be sacrificed in any other place than where His Name was named. Knowing that the days will come, after the suffering of Christ, when even the place in Jerusalem shall be given over to your enemies, all the offerings, in short, shall cease. The lamb, which God commanded to be wholly roasted, was a symbol of the suffering of the cross, which Christ would undergo. The lamb, which is roasted, is roasted and dressed up in the form of the cross. One spit is transfixed right through from the lower parts up to the head, and one across the back, to which are attached the legs of the lamb”.

Athanasius identified³⁸⁷ the Church’s celebration of Pascha (Greek, meaning *Passover*) with the Old Testament Passover in a number of his Paschal letters, and applies all the imagery of Old Testament Passover to modern Pascha³⁸⁸.

“Let us then, my beloved brethren, celebrate with thanksgiving the holy feast which now draws near to us, ‘girding up the loins of our minds’ (1 Peter 1:13), like our Savior Jesus Christ. Of Him it is written, ‘Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His reins’ (Isaiah 11:5). Each one of us having in his hand the staff which came out of the root of Jesse, and our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel (Isaiah 11:1, Ephesians 6:15), let us keep the feast. As Paul said, let us keep the Feast ‘not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (1 Corinthians 5:8), reverently trusting that we are reconciled through Christ, and not departing from faith in Him. Let us not defile ourselves with heretics, and strangers to the truth, whose conversation and whose will degrade them. But rejoicing in afflictions, we break through the furnace³⁸⁹ of iron (Deuteronomy 4:20) and darkness, and pass, unharmed, over that terrible Red Sea”.

Athanasius also spoke³⁹⁰ of the Passover: we should not keep the Feast after an earthly manner, but with the angels in heaven. This includes the forty-day fast – akin to the forty years in the wilderness – to be purified and freed from defilement.

“Wherefore let us not celebrate the Feast after an earthly manner, but as keeping festival in heaven with the angels. Let us glorify the Lord, by chastity, by righteousness, and other virtues. Let us rejoice, not in ourselves, but in the Lord, that we may be inheritors with the saints. Let us keep the Feast then, as Moses.

³⁸⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialog With Trypho*, 40.

³⁸⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* III, 5.

³⁸⁸ Pascha in the Orthodox Church is roughly equivalent to Easter in the West, but often occurs on a different day due to the use of a different calendar by East and West.

³⁸⁹ The Furnace of Iron: Some have interpreted this as a figurative reference to a hard life in Egypt. However, it could also refer to the kilns used in Egypt for making brick (Exodus. 1:10-14) and similar kilns for smelting iron to make weapons of war.

³⁹⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* VI, 12.

Let us watch like David who rose seven times, and in the middle of the night gave thanks for the righteous judgments of God. Let us be early, as he said, ‘In the morning I will stand before You, and You will look upon me; in the morning You will hear my voice’ (Psalm 5:3). Let us fast like Daniel (Daniel 9:3); let us pray without ceasing, as Paul commanded (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Let all of us recognize the season of prayer, but especially those who are honorably married; so that having borne witness to these things, and thus having kept the Feast, we may be able to enter into the joy of Christ in the kingdom of heaven. But as Israel, when going up to Jerusalem, was first purified in the wilderness, being trained to forget the customs of Egypt, the Word by this typifying to us the holy fast of forty days, let us first be purified and freed from defilement. So that when we depart this life, having been careful of fasting, we may be able to ascend to the upper chamber (Luke 14:15) with the Lord, to sup with Him; and may be partakers of the joy which is in heaven. In no other manner is it possible to go up to Jerusalem and to eat the Passover, except by observing the fast of forty days”.

Chrysostom tied³⁹¹ the mystery of the Passover to the mystery of the Lord’s Table, just as the Passion and the Cross are mysteries. The Lord’s Table was appointed in the fullness of time as the rituals of the Law were passing away. The Twelve had been prepared by Jesus’ teaching to be able to understand this.

“Why was it that He ordained this sacrament then, at the time of the Passover? That you might learn from everything, both that He is the lawgiver of the Old Testament, and that the things therein are foreshadowed because of these things. Therefore, I say, where the type is, there He puts the truth”.

“This He said, indicating that His passion and His cross are a mystery, by this comforting His disciples. Like Moses said, ‘This shall be to you for an everlasting memorial’ (Exodus 12:14), so He too, ‘in remembrance of Me’, until I come. Therefore also He said, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover’ (Luke 22:15); that is, to deliver you the new rites, and to give a Passover, by which I am to make you spiritual”.

“He Himself drank of it. On hearing this, they might say, What then? Do we drink blood, and eat flesh, and then be perplexed? When He began to speak concerning these things, many were offended (John 6:60-66). Therefore lest they should be troubled, He first did this Himself, leading them to the calm participation of the mysteries. Therefore He drank His own blood. On this account He said, ‘Do this’, that He might withdraw them from the other (i.e. the slaying of lambs). If this works remission of sins, as it surely does work it, the other is now superfluous”.

Athanasius of Alexandria added³⁹² that by being nourished at the Lord’s Table, we shall truly keep the Feast of the Passover:

“In the historical account, in no other place might the feast of the Passover be kept except in Jerusalem. Yet when the things pertaining to that time were fulfilled, and those which belonged to shadows had passed away, the preaching of the Gospel was about to extend everywhere. When the disciples were spreading the feast in all places, they asked the Savior, ‘Where do You want us to make

³⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXII, 1.

³⁹² Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, IV, 4.

ready?’ (Matthew 26:17) The Savior also, since He was changing the typical for the spiritual, promised them that they should no longer eat the flesh of a lamb, but His own, saying, ‘Take, eat and drink; this is My body, and My blood’ (Matthew 26:26-29). When we are thus nourished by these things, we also shall truly keep the feast of the Passover”.

6th Parable from Holy Saturday: Exodus 13:20-15:19 "Crossing the Red Sea"

This Reading is read on Holy Saturday, but it is being covered here for the purpose of continuity of subject matter. Immediately following the Passover Sacrifice, this Reading describes the events that occurred during the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread, which concluded with the crossing of the Red Sea. The Day of the Lord’s Passover was the 14th of Nisan, a Friday, and was the day the Lord was crucified. Holy Saturday, the 15th of Nisan, was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted until the 21st of Nisan. The 15th of Nisan and the 21st of Nisan were both Sabbaths, indicating that there was a special meaning for both days.

On the 15th of Nisan, Israel was on their way out of Egypt, beginning the Exodus. Also on the 15th of Nisan, or Holy Saturday, Christ was in Hades leading captivity captive. The 21st of Nisan is regarded by Hebrew tradition as the day of the crossing of the Red Sea. Moreover, this would make good sense logically. The Feast of Unleavened Bread generally speaks of separation and purification. Therefore, a complete and final separation of Israel from Egypt and the ways of Egypt fitly conclude the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Beginning in the evening of the 15th of Nisan and going on all night, the nation of Israel ate the roasted Passover lamb “with their loins girded, their sandals on your feet, and their staff in their hand; they ate it in haste” (Exodus 12:11). This they did as they left Egypt (Exodus 12:51).

Between the two Sabbaths, God, Himself, went before the Nation of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:17-22). This is the first time in the history of the people of God that God, Himself, physically led His people where He wanted them to go. Paul made some very significant statements concerning this week of Unleavened Bread and following: He said that all the people were baptized into Moses in both the cloud and in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-5). Moses represents Christ as head of the Church, the cloud represents the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the Red Sea represents separation from the things of this world.

1) Separation from the Things of This World

Unleavened bread was eaten because the nation of Israel left Egypt in haste, on short notice, and didn’t have time to leaven it (Exodus 12:39). Unleavened bread is later called “the bread of affliction” (Deuteronomy 16:3) because it was supposed to remind them of their affliction in Egypt (Deuteronomy 26:7). We might note that the texture of unleavened bread, being tougher than and not as tasty as leavened bread, might imply some kind of “hardship”.

After Israel left Egypt on the 15th of Nisan, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting Israel go, and pursued Israel with his entire army. The Lord led Israel, who was largely unarmed, with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21).

Trapped between the mountains, the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army, the people were terrified and cried to Moses. On the 21st of Nisan, Moses said, "Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today. The Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever" (Exodus 14:13). Moses then stretched his hand over the Red Sea and divided the waters (Exodus 14:21). Israel crossed on dry ground, and the Egyptians pursued. Moses then stretched his hand over the Red Sea again and the waters inundated the Egyptians (Exodus 14:22-28). Josephus added³⁹³ that the return of the waters to inundate Pharaoh's army involved a violent electrical storm also.

The two Sabbaths in the Feast of Unleavened Bread can be seen as going together. On the first Sabbath, they were declared free, and left Egypt; but they weren't really free from the power of Egypt. On the second Sabbath, they were set free from the power of Egypt once and for all. Following their deliverance, Israel sang the song of Moses (Exodus 15:1-18) accompanied by timbrels, as Miriam led the women in dancing (Exodus 15:20). This Song of Moses is still used today as part of the hymns of the Church on Holy Saturday.

Egypt is often used metaphorically throughout the Scriptures as a picture of the bondage and slavery of sin (Deuteronomy 5:6, 7:8; Exodus 20:2). Just as the nation of Israel had to leave the land of Egypt (a place of bondage), each believer has to leave his place of bondage, whatever it may be. Different people have different kinds of bondage; some have it with fornication, others with debauchery, others with lying or various forms of deceit, etc. The point is to leave it.

There are times when the power behind the bondage tries to come after us to bring us back to the bondage we've just left, very much as the armies of Pharaoh went after the Israelis. At this point, we should walk by faith and not by sight. Instead of crying out and desiring to go back to the bondage of Egypt as the Israelis did (Exodus 14:10-12), the thing to do is what Moses said: "Do not fear! Take your stand and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever" (Exodus 14:13). What followed was the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

On the second Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, just as Moses called the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea, "The salvation of the Lord", so Peter says that "baptism now saves you -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). By baptism he does not mean merely removing dirt from the flesh (washing or dunking in water), but "an appeal to God for a good conscience". Should the power behind our former bondage try to swallow us up after we have left our former bondage, appealing to our new Lord and Master will not go unheard (1 Corinthians 10:11-13).

³⁹³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xvi, 3.

2) The Power of Sin

The principle that is involved here is the destruction of the power of sin. If Egypt can be seen as representing the bondage and slavery of sin, then the armies of Pharaoh certainly represent the power of sin. At the baptism of the Israelis in the Red Sea, as the baptism of a believer, the power of sin is buried (cf. also 1 Corinthians 15:56; Romans 6:3-7, 14).

In short, what is happening here is that the baptism in the cloud is the “appeal to God for a good conscience,” and the baptism in the Red Sea is the demonstration or burial (in water) that is customarily referred to as “baptism.” Both are necessary!

In Orthodox tradition, there is a short prayer service on the evening before the day of the Baptism. This prayer service is called exorcism prayers and is intended to prepare the “newly illumined” for Baptism, and to “appeal to God for a good conscience”.

John Chrysostom carried³⁹⁴ this spiritual application one step further with regard to a desire to return to the Egypt of sin.

“Not only does he remind them of the ‘unleavened bread’ (1 Corinthians 5:7-8), but also to point out the affinity of the Old Testament with the New; and to point out also that it was impossible, after the ‘unleavened bread’, again to enter into Egypt. But if anyone chose to return, he would suffer the same things as the Egyptians did. For those things were shadows of these”.

Regarding the removal of all traces of leaven from their houses prior to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Chrysostom continued³⁹⁵ to say that this represents instruction for us to clean up our lives.

“Let us explain why the leaven is cast out of all their borders. What then is the hidden meaning? The believer must be freed from all iniquity. Among the Jews he perishes if he is found with old leaven, so also with us, whoever is found with iniquity. Since of course the punishment being so great in that case (Exodus 12:12, 19), which is a shadow, in our case it cannot choose but be much greater. If they so carefully clear their houses of leaven, and pry into mouse-holes; much more ought we to search through the soul so as to cast out every unclean thought”.

In one word, then, the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures separation: separation from an old life of a bondage to sin and various wickedness, and the beginning of a life of real righteousness, having been purified from former sins (2 Peter 1:9).

The number seven is generally recognized as representing perfection or completion. Eating unleavened bread for seven days would then represent a complete separation from the old life of bondage and its power. This separation is illustrated very dramatically in the inundation of the armies of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. Baptism in water makes a fitting conclusion to this “feast of separation” in that it adds a harmonic note of completion to the seven days of sincerity and truth (Compare 1 Peter 3:21).

³⁹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XV, 7.

³⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XV, 8.

The believer who has come through this “Feast of Separation” has a unique standing among mankind. Jesus Christ, Himself the firstborn of creation (Colossians 1:15) makes a distinction between “Israel and Egypt” (Exodus 11:7); that is between His own and those of the world (John 10:1-16). Those who are His own are said to have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life³⁹⁶, and are referred to collectively as “the general assembly and church of firstborn ones who have been enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). As such, they represent the firstborn of mankind and are designated to be a kingdom of priests to God the Father (Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6, 1 Peter 2:5, 9). All this was made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection, and this is illustrated by the sacking of Hades on Holy Saturday.

3) Bright Week in the Church Corresponds to the Feast of Unleavened Bread

According to the Law, unleavened bread was to be eaten throughout each of the seven days of the feast. Anyone eating something leavened was to be cut off from the nation of Israel! From the seriousness of the penalty of eating leavened foodstuffs, one might infer that this issue is at least one of, if not the, central issue of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul writes to the Corinthians and mentions both the Lord’s Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The “old leaven”, which was to be cleaned out of one’s dwelling (Exodus 12:19), which is spiritually, one’s life or one’s heart, is mentioned as referring to malice and wickedness, whereas the unleavened bread of the feast is mentioned as referring to sincerity and truth.

The way this works in real life is that our change in attitude becomes obvious to all our neighbors, just as Israel’s new life became obvious to all their neighbors. To understand this analogy, we must look carefully at the words that describe the cloud and the pillar that led Israel in the wilderness. At the giving of the Law from Mt. Sinai, the fire on top of Mt. Sinai “burned with fire to the midst of heaven” (Deuteronomy 4:11). This was no longer just a small bush burning, but was a huge fire thousands of feet tall that was visible to Israel’s neighbors over 50 miles away. As the Pillar moved, Israel moved; thus Israel’s neighbors knew where they were at any moment and when they were getting close. Sometimes we may think of the Pillar and the Cloud as a small dust devil (no pun intended) moving around in the wilderness. However, the Cloud was large enough to block the path of the 250,000-man³⁹⁷ Egyptian army (Exodus 14:19-20). As the neighbors of Israel watched Israel approach, they were completely demoralized. For example, Rahab, the Jericho harlot who welcomed the spies, testified that “the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og³⁹⁸, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Joshua 2:9-11). They knew that Israel’s God:

1. Spoke to Israel in person from the fire on Mt. Sinai.
2. Destroyed Egypt’s huge army in the Red Sea leaving no survivors.
3. Led Israel day by day through the wilderness.
4. Provided Israel with food from heaven every day.
5. Provided 600,000 Israelis plus all their livestock with water from a Rock.

³⁹⁶ See for example Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12-15, 21:27.

³⁹⁷ According to Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, xv, 3, Pharaoh led 600 select chariots, 50,000 cavalry, and 200,000 foot soldiers into the wilderness to bring Israel back.

³⁹⁸ Both Sihon and Og were much stronger than Israel at that time.

How can anyone fight against an army where the miraculous is normal procedure?

The same thing is true with us. As the veil of our perception is taken away (2 Corinthians 3:13-16), there is a change in our attitude that people can recognize. As we apply ourselves to the things of God, we begin to be led by the Holy Spirit, and people will start to recognize the Holy Spirit in us. This is true of those who have been newly baptized just before Pascha and those who have known the Lord for a long time.

Corresponding to the Feast of Unleavened Bread today is “Bright Week” in the Church. This is the week following Pascha (Easter), and there is a mystery here that not all are granted the ability to see. Having come through the forty days of fasting, corresponding to the forty years in the wilderness, we begin a time of rejoicing to celebrate our separation from the things of this world. Whereas strict fasting for 40 days preceded Pascha, fasting of any kind is forbidden during Bright Week following Pascha. This is a time of great rejoicing and fasting, which is a kind of mourning, is just not appropriate. The sincerity and truth that was displayed as a type in Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:8) now sees its fulfillment in Bright Week.

Ambrose of Milan stated³⁹⁹ that the depth of the mystery was veiled by Moses, so that only those to whom it has been given might know the mystery of the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:11-12).

“All do not see the depths of the mysteries, for they were hid from the Levites, lest they should see who ought not to see, and they who cannot serve should take it up. Moses saw the circumcision of the Spirit, but veiled it, so as to give circumcision only in an outward sign. He saw the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth; he saw the sufferings of the Lord, but he veiled the unleavened bread of truth in the material unleavened bread. He veiled the sufferings of the Lord in the sacrifice of a lamb or a calf”.

One can sense in the words of Exodus 11 and 12 an atmosphere of things happening quickly, on very short notice, with little time to prepare (Exodus 12:39; Deuteronomy 16:3). So it is when one comes to know the Lord. A life with God is not just something that one plans; it is a moment by moment walk with the Lord. Knowing the Lord as a name in a book is useless; one needs to listen to His direction as a voice in one’s heart. Just as the whole nation of Israel couldn’t help but break out in song after its baptism in the Red Sea (Exodus 15), so the new believer often can’t help but want to sing about his recent salvation and his newly-discovered Lord.

In the Orthodox calendar, the forty days of Lent preceding Pascha are spent in fasting and in mourning our expulsion from Paradise. We should be zealous in our fasting, but in a spiritual sense and not just in a fleshly sense. At Pascha, we celebrate our return to Paradise and we should earnestly desire this. Athanasius stated⁴⁰⁰ it in these words:

“Ours also is the Passover, the calling is from above, and ‘our conversation is in heaven’. As Paul says, ‘We have here no abiding city, but we seek that which is to come’ (Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 13:14). Looking forward, we properly keep the feast. Heaven truly is high, and its distance from us infinite; for ‘the heaven of heavens’, he says, ‘is the Lord’s’ (Psalm 115:16). But not, on

³⁹⁹ Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* I, 50, 260.

⁴⁰⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* XLIII.

that account, are we to be negligent or fearful, as though the way there were impossible. But rather should we be zealous. Yet not, as in the case of those who journeyed east and, finding a plain in Shinar, began to build a tower. There is no need for us to bake bricks with fire, and to seek asphalt for mortar (Genesis 11:3); for their tongues were confused, and their work was destroyed.

For us the Lord has consecrated a way through His blood, and has made it easy. Not only has He afforded us consolation respecting the distance, but also He has come and opened the door for us, which was once shut. It was shut from the time He cast out Adam from the delight of Paradise, and set the Cherubim and the flaming sword, that turned every direction, to keep the way of the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). This is now, however, opened wide. He that sits on the Cherubim, having appeared with greater grace and loving-kindness, led into Paradise with Himself the thief who confessed (Luke 23:40-43); and having entered heaven as our forerunner, opened the gates to all. Paul also, 'pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling' (Philippians 3:14), by it was taken up to the third heaven. Having seen those things which are above, he descended and he teaches us, announcing what is written to the Hebrews. 'You have not come to the mountain that can be touched and that burned with fire, to clouds and darkness, to a tempest, and to the voice of words. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven' (Hebrews 12:18-23). Who would not wish to enjoy companionship with these! Who would not desire to be enrolled with these, that he may hear with them (Matthew 25:34), 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'.

2nd Epistle: Galatians 3:13-14 "The Curse of the Tree"

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. (For it is written, 'Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree'.) That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:13-14).

Blessings and Curses: Galatians 3:13

Blessings and curses were proclaimed from adjacent mountain peaks as soon as Israel entered the Promised Land. Mt. Gerizim and the adjacent peak of Mt Ebal were both about 2500 ft. high and located in the center of Israel. Together they formed a part of an unusual liturgy performed by Joshua at the time of the Conquest (Deuteronomy 27:12-25, Joshua 8:30-35).

The Law was painted on stone on Mt. Ebal as an icon and as a curse for those who refuse to keep it (Deuteronomy 27:2-4). Cyprian stated⁴⁰¹ that the stones on which the Law was written represent Christ, the Lawgiver.

⁴⁰¹ Cyprian, Treatises XII, iii, 16.

The liturgy of blessings and the curses was very dramatic. The elders of six tribes stood on Mt Gerizim to bless the people who obey the Law; the elders of the other six tribes stood on Mt Ebal to curse the people who disobey the Law. And all the people responded with the “Amen” (Deuteronomy 27:12-26).

Since “those who are of faith are blessed with the believing Abraham” (Galatians 3:9), the blessing on Mt. Gerizim represents the blessing Abraham received for loving God and neighbor (Genesis 15:6). Mt. Gerizim continued to stand for holiness to the Samaritans. Photini, the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, a town which was at the foot of Mt. Gerizim (John 4:7-9), considered Mt. Gerizim more proper than Jerusalem (John 4: 19-24). There was some logic to her understanding.

On the other hand, “the Law is not made for a righteous person” (1 Timothy 1:9), and “as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse” (Galatians 3:10, Deuteronomy 27:26). In His answer to Photini regarding Mt. Gerizim, Jesus spoke of true worship in spirit and truth – that would take place elsewhere.

The curse on Mt. Ebal represents what those who refuse to love God and neighbor can expect to receive after being reminded by the Law their entire life about what God expects, and yet refusing to obey. To show the love of God for His people, Christ Himself became the curse that was proclaimed on Mt. Ebal in becoming sin and taking away the sin of the world (Galatians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Tertullian referred⁴⁰² to the blessing and the curse as good and evil.

“Behold”, says the Lord, “I have set before you good and evil (Deuteronomy 30:15). Choose that which is good. You can choose good if you will because He has proposed it to your free-will. If you cannot because you will not, then you ought to depart from Him whose will you do not do”.

Another aspect of the curse comes from a body hanging on a tree. Because the Land was holy, due to the dwelling place of the Lord in its midst, there were certain commandments that the Lord gave to Moses in order to preserve holiness. One of these aimed at preserving the Land from defilement due to dead bodies. This commandment reads:

“And if there is sin in anyone, *and* the judgment of death *is upon him*, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall by all means bury it on that day. For everyone that is hanged on a tree is cursed of God; and you shall by no means defile the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 21:21-23 LXX).

The commandment in the Mosaic Law regarding hanging on a tree referred to crucifixion; but the method of crucifixion was different when Moses drafted the Law. In c. 1500 BC, the criminal was first executed, and then crucified. The crucifixion just emphasized the shame of the deed perpetrated by the criminal, and didn’t torture the criminal to death like the Roman version of crucifixion. Taking the body down at the end of the day was no problem in Moses’ day because the criminal was already dead before crucifixion. In Roman times, when criminals were crucified while still alive, it could take several days for the victim to die. In both

⁴⁰² Tertullian, On Monogamy, xiv.

cases, the “curse” of crucifixion was illustrated in the public display of a person’s guilt, along with the shame of nakedness.

When Christ redeemed us from the “curse”, which was the penalty for our sins, the principle behind the redemption was a buying back from the penalty of our sin (Hebrews 9:12-15). Cyril of Alexandria stated⁴⁰³,

“We have seen Him obedient to the Laws of Moses; or rather we have seen Him, Who as God is the Legislator, subject to His own decrees. The reason for this Paul teaches us, saying, ‘When we were babes we were enslaved under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law’ (Galatians 4:3). Christ therefore ransomed from the curse of the Law those who being subject to it, and had been unable to keep its enactment”.

The seal on the tomb is analogous to the curse of the Law. The seal proclaimed that death was inevitable for everyone, and there was no avoiding it. Likewise the “curse” of the Law as the penalty of our sins is inevitable. Just as the Jewish leaders applied the seal to guarantee that the Christ’s body stayed in the grave, so the “curse” of the Law guaranteed that those who sinned (which is everyone) stayed in Hades. By becoming man and taking the “curse” on Himself via the Cross and the Resurrection, Christ removed the curse and ransomed us.

Much Misinterpretation of the Curse by Heretics

“Over the centuries, there has been a great deal of misinterpretation by heretics of various statements in the Scriptures that deal with Christ taking on our curse. Some interpreted this to mean that He was not really God. To counter this, Gregory the Theologian compared⁴⁰⁴ Christ taking on our curse to Christ taking on human flesh. He was not transformed into flesh or a curse, as some of the heretics said, but remained the same God”.

“The passage, The Word was made Flesh, seems to me to be equivalent to that in which it is said that He was made sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), or a curse (Galatians 3:13) for us. The Lord was not transformed into either of these; how could He be? He took sin and the curse upon Him; He took away our sins and bore our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4).

Athanasius of Alexandria added⁴⁰⁵ that Christ’s human body is not co-essential with the Father as is His Deity. Just as He was made flesh, so He became a curse for us. He did not Himself become a curse in His Deity, but took it on in His humanity on our behalf.

“The body in which the Word was is not co-essential with the Godhead, but was truly born of Mary, while the Word Himself was not changed into bones and flesh, but came in the flesh. What John said, ‘The Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14), has this meaning, as we may see by a similar passage. Paul wrote, ‘Christ has become a curse for us’ (Galatians 3:13). Just as He has not Himself become a curse, but did so because He took on Him the curse on our behalf, so also He has become flesh, not by being changed into flesh, but because He assumed living flesh on our behalf, and has become Man. To say ‘the Word became flesh’, is equivalent to saying ‘the Word has become man’. According to

⁴⁰³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Luke, Chap. 2.

⁴⁰⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, Letter to Cledonius the Priest, Ep. 101.

⁴⁰⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Letter to Epictetus”, Personal Letters, LIX, 8.

what is said in Joel: 'I will pour forth of My Spirit on all flesh' (Joel 2:28); the promise did not extend to the irrational animals, but is for men, on whose account the Lord has become Man".

Gregory of Nyssa responded⁴⁰⁶ to heretics of his day who said that Christ 'becoming obedient' implies that He is not God. His "obedience" had to do with His emptying Himself to accomplish the work of the Cross, and not with His Deity.

"At what point of time was it said of Him, that He 'became obedient'? (Philippians 2:8) It was when He came in the form of a servant to accomplish the mystery of redemption by the cross, Who emptied Himself, Who humbled Himself by assuming the likeness and fashion of a man (Philippians 2:7-8), being found as man in man's lowly nature. Then it was that He became obedient, even He Who 'took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses' (Matthew 8:17, Isaiah 53:4), healing the disobedience of men by His own obedience. That by His stripes He might heal our wound, and by His own death do away with the common death of all men. Then it was that for our sakes He was made obedient, even as He became 'sin' (2 Corinthians 5:21) and 'a curse' (Galatians 3:13), not being so by nature, but becoming so in His love for man. Every inspired Scripture attests His independent and sovereign power, saying, 'He spoke the word and they were made; He commanded and they were created' (Psalm 148:5). It is plain that the Psalmist says this concerning Him, Who upholds 'all things by the word of His power'" (Hebrews 1:3).

Athanasius also stated⁴⁰⁷ that the Arians of his day were in error to call Christ a creature, created by God. Just as Christ put on flesh at the Incarnation, so also He became sin and a curse for us. These things affected His humanity, not His Deity.

"The Lord, knowing His own Essence to be the Only-begotten Wisdom and Offspring of the Father, says in love to man. 'The Lord created me a beginning of His ways' (Proverbs 8:22), as if to say, 'My Father has prepared for Me a body, and has created Me for men in behalf of their salvation'. When John says, 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1:14), we do not conceive the whole Word Himself to be flesh, but to have put on flesh and become man. On hearing, 'Christ has become a curse for us,' and 'He has made Him sin for us who knew no sin' (Galatians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 5:21) we do not simply conceive this, that the entire Christ has become curse and sin. He has taken on Him the curse, which was against us. As Paul has said, 'Has redeemed us from the curse' (Galatians 3:13); as Isaiah said, 'has carried our sins' (Isaiah 53:4); and as Peter has written, 'has borne them in the body on the wood' (1 Peter 2:24). So, if it is said in the Proverbs 'He created,' (Proverbs 8:22) we must not conceive that the entire Word is in nature a creature".

Ambrose of Milan stated⁴⁰⁸ that Christ being all and in all implies that there is no one subject to another in the Trinity, but all are co-equal. He is made the object or goal⁴⁰⁹ in us,

⁴⁰⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 11.

⁴⁰⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, II, xix, 47.

⁴⁰⁸ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, xiv, 176-178.

however, as we treat the least of our brethren as Him. Similarly, He was made sin and a curse not in His Eternal Nature, but in bearing our sin and our curse. He continues to be made sin and a curse as He is subject to this condition in our weak brethren. Conversely, through Him, we sit in heavenly places and He makes us partakers of the Divine Nature in His power.

“That you might know that when he says, ‘That God may be all in all’ (1 Corinthians 15:28), he does not separate Christ from God the Father. He also says, ‘Where there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all’ (Colossians 3:11). So also, ‘That God may be all and in all’, he comprehended in that the unity and equality of Christ with God the Father, for the Son is not separated from the Father. And in like manner as the Father works all and in all, so also Christ works all in all (1 Corinthians 12:6). If, then, Christ also works all in all, He is not made the goal in the glory of the Godhead, but in us. He is made the goal in us by being made lower than the angels, I mean in the sacrament of His body. Yet all things which served their Creator from their first beginning seemed not as yet to be made the goal to Him in that.”

“If you should ask how He was made the goal in us, He Himself shows us, saying, ‘I was in prison, and you came to Me; I was sick, and you visited Me. Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these you have done it to Me’ (Matthew 25:36-40). You hear of Him in subjection, and are moved, though He is sick and weak in Him in whom He is in subjection, in whom He was made sin and a curse for us.”

“He was made sin and a curse not on His own account but on ours, so He became the goal in us not for His own sake but for ours, being not in subjection in His eternal Nature, nor accursed in His eternal Nature. ‘For cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree’ (Galatians 3:13). Cursed He was, for He bore our curses. He was in subjection, also, for He took upon Him our subjection, but in the assumption of the form of a servant, not in the glory of God. While he makes Himself a partaker of our weakness in the flesh, He makes us partakers of the Divine Nature in His power. But neither in one nor the other have we any natural fellowship with the heavenly Generation of Christ, nor is there any subjection of the Godhead in Christ. But as the Apostle has said that on Him through that flesh which is the pledge of our salvation, we sit in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), though certainly not sitting ourselves. So also He is said to be the goal in us through the assumption of our nature.”

John Chrysostom stated⁴¹⁰ that the Jewish leaders eagerly desired to apply the curse of crucifixion to Christ in order to make Him an abomination among men. Therefore two robbers were crucified with Him. But it turned out the opposite and His glory shone forth all the greater.

“Truly it is a great and unspeakable thing, that He became a servant; that He underwent death, is far greater. But there is something still greater, and stranger. All deaths are not alike; His death seemed to be the most ignominious of all, to be full of shame, to be accursed; for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). For this cause the

⁴⁰⁹ “The object” implies a goal where we are subject to Christ, where the words “object” versus “subject” are trying to convey a difficult point. We don’t normally think of Christ being still subject to sin and a curse; but if He is living in our weak and downtrodden brethren, this is the case.

⁴¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, VII.

Jews eagerly desired to slay Him in this manner, to make Him a reproach. If no one fell away from Him by reason of His death, yet they might from the manner of His death. For this cause two robbers were crucified with Him, and He in the midst, that He might share their ill repute, and that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'He was numbered with the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12). Yet so much the more does truth shine forth; for when His enemies plot such things against His glory, and it yet shines forth, so much the greater does the matter seem. By slaying Him in such a way they thought to make Him more abominable than all men, but they availed nothing. Both the robbers also were such impious ones, (for it was afterward that the one repented) that, even when on the cross, they reviled Him. Neither the consciousness of their own sins, their present punishment, or their suffering the same things themselves, restrained their madness. Wherefore the one spoke to the other, and silenced him by saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation?' (Luke 23:40) Their wickedness was this great!"

The Blessing of Abraham: Galatians 3:14

Paul stated, "That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:13-14).

Old Testament and New Testament writers alike used the life of Abraham as the model of a righteous life and a close walk with God. He was called "The friend of God" (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:21-24), and because of his faith, Israel inherited the Promised Land. The Church, with Christ as Head, has inherited the blessing of Abraham in the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). By faith Abraham obeyed and he had the vision to wait for the city which has foundations, whose craftsman and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham believed God and belief (i.e. faith) was reckoned to him as righteousness. He is called the father of all who believe and the heir of the world (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:11ff). Thus Abraham exemplifies the Grace of God. Abraham received faith according to grace (Romans 4:16), just as all who since him have received faith.

Yet Abraham didn't live in a vacuum; he lived according to the Law that had been handed down from Adam. Tertullian⁴¹¹ expressed this as follows,

"For in this law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts which afterward sprouted forth when given through Moses. That is, You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; you shall love your neighbor as yourself; you shall not kill, etc."

John Cassian added⁴¹² that the saints prior to Abraham observed the commands not only of the Law but even anticipated those of the Gospel. In Abraham this "law of love" produced a close relationship with God and Abraham was called "The friend of God" (James 2:23, 2 Chronicles 20:7). This also occurred with Moses, where God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend (Exod. 33:11). Christ illustrated this further. Speaking to His disciples, the Lord said, "No longer do I call you slaves, for a slave does not know what his Master is doing; but I have called you friends" (John 15:15).

⁴¹¹ Tertullian, Answer to the Jews, I, iii, 2

⁴¹² John Cassian, Conferences, I, viii, 23

As it is written, "The law is not made for a righteous person" (1 Timothy 1:9). Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. In light of this, Irenaeus wrote⁴¹³,

"The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves".

The Early Church taught⁴¹⁴ that the purpose of all the details of the Mosaic Law was as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry, like the Golden Calf, at any moment. For these people and others like them the details of the Law were necessary and He bound them with bonds, a burden and a hard collar. When Christ came in the flesh, He did not take away the Law, but the bonds and the collar.

The purpose of the Law was as our pedagogue until Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). Yet Jesus said of Abraham, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). As a result, Abraham is referred to as "The father of all those who believe" (Romans 4:11). Those who obey the Law as Abraham did are now sons of Abraham and heirs according to the promise and are blessed with the believing Abraham (Galatians 3:7, 9, 29). John Chrysostom added⁴¹⁵,

"Paul showed that Faith was prior to the Law, as is evident from Abraham's case, who was justified before the giving of the Law. He shows too that late events fell out according to prophesy. 'The Scripture', says he, 'foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham' (Galatians 3:8-9). Before He gave the Law, He Himself had decreed that the Gentiles should be justified by Faith. For He said, referring to the words spoken to the Patriarch, 'In you shall all nations be blessed' (Gen. 12:4) at a time when Faith existed, not the Law. 'So then they which are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham'.

Comparing Israel to the Church, Chrysostom continued⁴¹⁶ to say that the same Grace saves us, but the honor is greater.

"If now they were chosen by God not for their own good deeds, it is clear that by grace they obtained this honor. We too are all saved by grace, but for objects much greater and higher. By this grace we have become the beloved of God, no longer as servants, but as sons and friends".

Impacts of the Curse

With the seal on the stone, Christ in the grave descended into hell, which is the subject for the Study of Holy Saturday. John Chrysostom stated⁴¹⁷ that Christ, by being sinless,

⁴¹³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 3.

⁴¹⁴ Apostolic Constitutions, VI, iv, 20-21

⁴¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary On Galatians, 3.

⁴¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIV, 2.

⁴¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians, Chapter 3, v. 13.

exchanged curses with us. This was like an innocent man dying for another, who had been sentenced to death.

“People were subject to a curse, which says, ‘Cursed is every one that continues not in the things that are written in the book of the Law’ (Deuteronomy 27:26). To this curse, people were subject, for no man had continued in, or was a keeper of, the whole Law; but Christ exchanged this curse for the other, ‘Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13). Both he who hanged on a tree, and he who transgresses the Law is cursed. As it was necessary for Christ to be free from the curse that He was about to relieve us from, He received another curse instead of it. Therefore Christ took upon Him our curse, and thereby relieved us from it. It was like an innocent man’s undertaking to die for another sentenced to death, and so rescuing him from punishment. Christ took upon Him not the curse of transgression, but the other curse, in order to remove that of others. For, ‘He had done no violence neither was any deceit in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22). By dying He rescued from death those who were dying, so by taking on Himself the curse, He delivered them from it”.

John Chrysostom also stated⁴¹⁸ several reasons why the Holy Spirit had to wait for Christ to leave at the Ascension. One of these is that the curse had not yet been taken away, sin was not yet loosed, but all were yet subject to vengeance; therefore He could not come. It was necessary that the enmity be put away, and that we be reconciled to God; then we could receive that Gift from the Holy Spirit.

Many Church Fathers, in their commentaries, referred to the cross as “the tree” or just as “the wood”. This is reasonable, since the word used for “cross” most of the time is *stauros*, meaning “an upright stake”, but sometimes the word *xulon*, meaning “wood”, is used⁴¹⁹. The Greek word, *stauros*, does not have to have a crossbeam in order to be called a “cross”, and for executions in Roman times, different types of crosses were sometimes used. A “Cross” could be just a plain vertical stake where the victim’s hands were tied or nailed above his head. If a “cross” did not have to have a crossbeam, referring to the Cross that Jesus died on as “a tree” (1 Peter 2:24, Galatians 3:13) is perfectly consistent with the meaning of *stauros*.

In contrast to the teachings of the Church, Tertullian addressed⁴²⁰ the heretic Marcion’s notion of competing deities by spelling out the blessings of faith and the curse inherent in the Law. In becoming man, Christ submitted to the curse of the Law. What the heretic omitted was the mention of Abraham, and how we are children of faith by believing as Abraham did.

“The object of the faith, whereby the just man shall live, will be that same God, to whom belongs the law; by doing the Law, however, no man is justified. Since there equally are found the curse in the Law and the blessing in faith, you have both conditions set forth by the Creator. ‘Behold, I have set before you a blessing and a curse’ (Deuteronomy 11:26). Paul declares that ‘Christ was made a curse for us’ (Galatians 3:13) as the result of the Creator’s appointment. But yet it by no means follows, because the Creator said of old, ‘Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23 LXX), that Christ belonged to another god,

⁴¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVIII, 3.

⁴¹⁹ See for example Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24, Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29.

⁴²⁰ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 5, 3.

and on that account was accursed even then in the Law. It is more suitable for the Creator to have delivered His own Son to His own curse, than to have submitted Him to the malediction of that god of yours”.

“What I say, then, is this, that God is the object of faith, who prefigured the grace of faith. But when he also adds, ‘You are all the children of faith’ (Galatians 3:26), it becomes clear that what the heretic erased was the mention of Abraham’s name. By faith Paul declares us to be ‘children of Abraham’ (Galatians 3:7, 9, 29), and after mentioning him he expressly called us ‘children of faith’ also. But how are we children of faith, and of whose faith, if not Abraham’s? For ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’ (Genesis 15:6, Galatians 3:6). He deserved for that reason to be called ‘the father of many nations’ (Genesis 17:4-5, Romans 4:17-18). We, who are even more like him (Romans 4:11) in believing in God, are thereby justified as Abraham was, and thereby also obtain life, since the just lives by his faith. It therefore happens that, as he called us ‘sons of Abraham’, so here he named us ‘children of faith’, for it was owing to his faith that it was promised that Abraham should be the father of many nations”.

Old Testament Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14 "The Dry Bones Come Together"

“And the hand of the Lord came upon me, and the Lord brought me forth by the Spirit, and set me in the midst of the plain, and it was full of human bones. And he led me round about them every way: and, behold, there were very many on the face of the plain, very dry. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, will these bones live?’ And I said, ‘O Lord God, you know this’. And he said to me, ‘Prophecy upon these bones, and you shall say to them, You dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord to these bones; Behold, I will bring upon you the breath of life. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and will spread skin upon you, and will put my Spirit into you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord’. So I prophesied as the Lord commanded me. And it came to pass while I was prophesying, that, behold, there was a shaking, and the bones approached each one to his joint. And I looked, and behold, sinews and flesh grew upon them, and skin came upon them above; but there was no breath in them. And he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord; Come from the four winds, and breathe upon these dead men, and let them live’. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath entered into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, a very great congregation. And the Lord spoke to me, saying, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; and they say, Our bones are become dry, our hope has perished, we are quite spent. Therefore prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord. Behold, I will open your tombs, and will bring you up out of your tombs, and will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves that I may bring up my people from their graves. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you upon your own land. You shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, says the Lord’” (Ezekiel 37:1 LXX).

Some modern commentaries have interpreted this prophecy as referring to the modern reforming of the nation of Israel, but the Church Fathers don’t interpret it that way. Ezekiel’s prophecy of the dry bones refers to the Resurrection of the dead at the Second Coming of Christ. This relates to the sealing of Christ’s tomb in that we were buried with Him. In the words of Paul, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was

raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. If we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:4-5).

Regarding Ezekiel’s prophecy, Ambrose noted⁴²¹ that the bones could hear the Lord’s words while they were dry and scattered. This should not be reckoned as being improbable, since (1) the mute earth was told to produce grass and trees, (2) the rock gave water at the touch of the rod, and (3) the rod changed into a snake. Living things can be produced from those that are without life⁴²².

“The prophet shows that there was hearing and movement in the bones before the Spirit of life was poured upon them. The dry bones are asked to hear, as if they had the sense of hearing, and that upon hearing, each of them came to its own joint. ‘The bones came together, each one to its joint’” (Ezekiel 37:7).

“Great is the loving kindness of the Lord, that the prophet is taken as a witness of the future resurrection, that we, too might see it with his eyes. All could not be taken as witnesses, but in that one, we all are witnesses, for neither does lying come upon a holy man, nor error upon so great a prophet”.

“This should not appear to be improbable, that at the command of God the bones were fitted again to their joints, since we have numberless instances in which nature has obeyed the commands of heaven. For example, the earth was told to bring forth grass and trees (Genesis 1:11-12). The rock at the touch of the rod gave forth water for the thirsting people (Exodus 17:6). The hard stone poured forth streams by the mercy of God for those parched with heat (Numbers 20:7-11). The rod changed into a serpent (Exodus 4:2-5, 7:8-13) to signify that, at the will of God, living things can be produced from those that are without life. Do you think it more incredible that bones should come together when commanded, than that streams should be turned back or the seas flee? The prophet testifies, ‘The sea saw it and fled, Jordan was driven back’ (Psalm 114:3-5). Nor can there be any doubt about this fact, which was proven by the rescue of one and the destruction of the other of two peoples. The waves of the sea stood restrained, and at the same time surrounded one people, and poured back upon the other for their death, that they might overwhelm the one, but preserve the other (Exodus 14:21-29). In the Gospel, did not the Lord Himself prove there that the sea grew calm at a word, the clouds were driven away, the blasts of the winds yielded, and the dumb elements obeyed God?” (Mark 8:23-27).

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁴²³ that Ezekiel’s prophecy establishes, along with other events, the doctrine of the Resurrection. In His three-year ministry, the Lord gave glimpses of this by using things more within our reach. By various miracles and by raising the dead, He showed His life-giving power.

“There are many passages of Holy Scripture that establish the doctrine of the Resurrection. For instance, Ezekiel leaps in the spirit of prophecy over all the

⁴²¹ Ambrose, “On the Belief in the Resurrection”, *Decease of His Brother Satyrus*, II, 72-75.

⁴²² Other examples are the words of John the Baptist, “I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Matthew 3:9). Christ’s words to the Pharisees on Palm Sunday, when they asked Him to quiet down His disciples, “But He answered and said to them, ‘I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out’” (Luke 19:40).

⁴²³ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and the Resurrection”, *Philosophical Works*.

intervening time, with its vast duration. He stands, by his powers of foresight, in the actual moment of the Resurrection, and, as if he had really gazed on what is still to come, brings it in his description before our eyes. He saw a mighty plain, unfolded to an endless distance before him, and vast heaps of bones upon it flung at random, some this way, some that. Then under an impulse from God these bones began to move and group themselves with their fellows that they once owned, and adhere to the familiar sockets, and then clothe themselves with muscle, flesh, and skin. A Spirit in fact was giving life and movement to everything that lay there”.

“But as regards Paul’s description of the wonders of the Resurrection, ‘with a shout’ and the ‘sound of trumpets’, in the language of the Word, all dead and prostrate things shall be ‘changed in the twinkling of an eye’ into immortal beings (1 Corinthians 15:50-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). In the Gospels, our Lord does not declare in word alone that the bodies of the dead shall be raised up again. But He shows in action the Resurrection itself, making a beginning of this work of wonder from things more within our reach and less capable of being doubted. First, He displays His life-giving power in the case of the deadly forms of disease, and chases those maladies by one word of command (Matthew 4:24). Then He raises a little girl just dead (Mark 5:38-42); then He makes a young man, who is already being carried out, sit up on his bier, and delivers him to his mother (Luke 7:11-15). After that He calls forth from his tomb the four-days-dead and decomposing Lazarus (John 11:38-44), giving life to the prostrate body with His commanding voice. Then after three days He raises from the dead His own human body (Romans 6:4), pierced though it was with the nails and spear, and brings the print of those nails and the spear-wound to witness to the Resurrection (John 20:25-29).

Irenaeus wrote⁴²⁴ that the dry bones speak of the bodily Resurrection of the saints, which was not taught by some of the early heretics. To demonstrate that He was the same God, Who created man in the beginning, Christ re-formed the eyes of the man born blind. He supplied in public what He had omitted to form in the womb. Thus He demonstrated His ability to put the dry bones back together.

“We perceive that the Creator is, in this passage from Ezekiel, represented as giving life to our dead bodies, promising resurrection to them, and resuscitation from their sepulchers and tombs, conferring upon them immortality also. He says, ‘As the tree of life, so shall their days be’ (Isaiah 65:22 LXX). He is shown to be the only God who accomplishes these things, and as Himself, the good Father, benevolently conferring life on those who have not life from themselves”.

“For this reason the Lord most plainly revealed Himself and the Father to His disciples, lest they might seek after another God besides Him, who formed man, and who gave him the breath of life. He did this that man might not rise to such a pitch of madness as to pretend that there is another Father⁴²⁵ above the Creator. Thus also He healed by a word all the others who were in a weakly condition because of sin. To whom He said, ‘Behold, you are made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you’ (John 5:14). He pointed out by this,

⁴²⁴ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, xv, 1-2.

⁴²⁵ “Another father above the Creator” was the heretical teaching of Simon Magus and his followers. For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St. Athanasius Press, 2003.

that, because of the sin of disobedience, infirmities have come upon men. To that man, however, who had been blind from his birth, He gave sight, not by means of a word, but by an outward action. He did this with a purpose, that He might show forth the hand of God, that which at the beginning had molded man. And therefore, when His disciples asked Him for what cause the man had been born blind, whether for his own or his parents' fault, He replied, 'Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be revealed in him'" (John 9:2-3).

"Now the work of God is the fashioning of man. As the Scripture says, He made man by a kind of process. 'The Lord took clay from the earth, and formed man' (Genesis 2:7). Also the Lord spit on the ground and made clay, and smeared it on the eyes (John 9:6-7), pointing out the original fashioning of man, how it was effected, and demonstrating the hand of God to those who can understand. That which the artificer, the Word, had omitted to form in the womb, that is, the blind man's eyes, He then supplied in public, that the works of God might be demonstrated in him. He did this in order that we might not be seeking out another hand by which man was fashioned, or another Father".

Ambrose noted⁴²⁶ that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are involved in raising the dead.

"It is a prerogative of God to raise the dead. 'As the Father raises the dead and quickens them, so the Son also quickens whom He will' (John 5:21). But the Spirit also raises them, for it is written, 'He shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwells in you' (Romans 8:11). But that you may not think this a trivial grace, learn that the Spirit also raises, for the prophet Ezekiel says, 'Come, O Spirit, and breathe on these dead, and they shall live. And I prophesied as He commanded me, and the Spirit of life entered into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet an exceeding great company' (Ezekiel 37:9-10). Farther on God says, 'You shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall open your graves, that I may bring My people out of their graves, and I will give you My Spirit, and you shall live'" (Ezekiel 37:13-14).

⁴²⁶ Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit*, III, xix, 149.