

THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY

September 25, 2011
1st Sunday of Luke
Revision F

GOSPEL: Luke 5:1-11
EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

In the West, today's Gospel lesson is used either on the 5th Sunday after Pentecost or the 5th Sunday after Epiphany. In the Eastern lectionary, today's Gospel lesson from Matthew 4 is used also for the Second Sunday after Pentecost.

This Sunday's Gospel is about the calling of four of the Twelve and concludes with them leaving everything to follow the Lord. To understand some of the details, we need to understand what fishing was like on the Sea of Galilee and also what it meant for them to leave everything.

Background: The Life of Jesus and the Twelve

This was not the first contact Jesus ever made with Peter, Andrew, James and John. James and John were Jesus' 2nd cousins and had known Him since they were children. Many of the Twelve were with Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana, which occurred just before Passover earlier in the year, which was 27 AD (John 2). They were there when John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the One he came to announce (John 3). At that time, Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John, where Jesus' disciples actually did the baptizing (John 4:2). Prior to that, some of the Twelve had been disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:36-37). They had recently traveled with Jesus back and forth from Galilee and were there with the Samaritan woman by the well in Sychar (John 4). The reading from Luke 5 is set late in the year 27, the first year of Jesus' public ministry, which began just before Passover at Cana. The Twelve were not necessarily full-time disciples yet. They were still working at their trade, perhaps to earn enough that they could travel with Jesus part-time. After they made their decisions to follow Jesus full-time, some of the Holy Women pitched in to help support them (Luke 8:2-3).

Background: Fishing in the Sea of Galilee

Fishing on the Sea of Galilee changed very little between the 1st Century and the middle of the 20th Century. By the 1950's, synthetic fiber nets replaced cotton and linen, motors replaced oars and sails and electronic fish-finders came into use. Not surprisingly, fish hauls increased and indigenous species began to be depleted; new species were introduced.

Types of Fish Present

In the 1st Century, four species of fish were common. The first was a catfish, which was of no economic importance because it was "unclean". From Leviticus 11:9-12, seafood must have fins and scales to be kosher; catfish have no scales.

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The second species was the sardine and represented about half the yearly tonnage taken from the lake. In the story of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:9-10) and of the 4,000 (Matthew 15:34-38) the fish that were multiplied were sardines. The city of Magdala on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee was the center of the sardine pickling industry in the region.

A third species of fish was the barbel, a member of the carp family. The largest of the barbels, the Long-headed Barbel, is a nice looking fish resembling a trout that feeds on small fish and mollusks. The barbel can reach 30 inches in length and can weigh 15 pounds.

The fourth species of fish is called the musht today (meaning “comb” in Arabic) and has a long dorsal fin resembling a comb. The musht feed on plankton and congregate in shoals, especially as cold weather approaches. Since the musht is the only large fish found in shoals, this has to be the species involved in several New Testament accounts. The musht can reach 18 inches in length and can weigh 5 pounds.

The musht is a flat white fish and is often prepared by frying (compare John 21:9). The skeleton consists of an easily detached backbone and relatively few small bones, thus making it easy to eat. Since it is one of the tastiest fish in the lake, it has been called St. Peter’s fish from an account in Matthew 17:24-27. Peter paid the Temple tax for Jesus by catching a fish (with a baited hook) and taking a coin from the fish’s mouth.

There are two different opinions on why a fish might have a shekel coin in its mouth. Gower stated¹ that the fish involved was the tilapa, also called the musht today. Tilapa carry their eggs and later the young fish in their mouths. Even when they go in search of food for themselves, the young still return to the protection of the mother’s mouth. When the mother fish wishes to keep them out, she will pick up an object (a bright one, preferably) and keep it in her mouth to prevent their return. In this case, Gower suggested that the fish had picked up a shekel coin.

However, Peter caught the fish with a baited hook; musht eat plankton and wouldn’t respond to bait. Mendel Nun therefore suggested² that Peter must have caught a barbel, which is a trout-like fish that would respond to a baited hook. Local traditions, he said, later applied the name “St. Peter’s fish” to the more popular eating fish. Nun doesn’t mention what a barbel would be doing with a coin in its mouth. This miracle was so great that it would be a small extra feature if it were a musht that responded to Peter’s hook.

Fishing Methods

Three types of nets were referred to in both New and Old Testaments. These types of nets have been used for thousands of years and require much different techniques.

The first type, a dragnet (Greek *sagaynay*), is the oldest type and is shown in Figure 1. Typical dragnets or seines were up to 1,000 feet long and 25 feet high. It was spread out by boat 100 yards or more from shore and then hauled to shore by a team of 16 men. Sinkers kept the bottom of the net down and floats kept the top on the surface. When the net reached the shore,

¹ Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, p. 131, Chicago, 1998.

² Mendel Nun, “Cast Your Net Upon the Waters”, Biblical Archaeology Review, Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 46-56.

the fish were sorted and the catfish were thrown away. This is the type of net referred to in Matthew 13:47-50. This net couldn't be used if the shoreline was rocky or had kelp growing near the shore.

A second type of net is a cast net or bag net (Greek *amphiblestron*) and is shown in Figure 2. This type is circular, about 25 feet in diameter and has lead weights all around the outer edge. After the net is thrown and sinks to the bottom, it is either retrieved by a system of cords or by a diver. When Peter and Andrew were called (Matthew 4:18), they were using this net, perhaps catching sardines. When Peter and Andrew left their nets (Matthew 4:20), they left the third type of net: their trammel nets.

A third type of net is called a trammel net (Greek *diktuon*). This type of net has three layers as shown in Figure 3 and was used only at night. It was not useful during the day because the fish could see the weaving and avoid it. Modern synthetic fiber, which is invisible under water, has made trammel nets useful today in the daytime. The trammel net was spread in a crescent shape roughly parallel to the shoreline. The boat that laid the net then quietly maneuvered toward shore between the net and the shore. All of a sudden the fishermen in the boat started making racket by beating the water with oars or stamping on the bottom of the boat. The frightened fish headed for deep water — right into the net and became entangled.

The trammel net was lowered and hauled up perhaps a dozen times during the night. Early in the morning the net was washed, repaired and hung up to dry, thus preparing for the next night's work.

A variation of the trammel net usage is called the veranda method³ and is used during the daytime.

Gospel Lesson: Luke 5:1-11, Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20

Implications of the Miracle of the Fish

The type of net referred to in Luke 5 is the trammel net. Peter, Andrew, James and John had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Jesus arrived early in the morning while they were finishing up using bag nets (Matthew 4:18) and He taught from Peter's boat for a while. After Jesus stopped teaching, He said to Peter, "Launch out to deep water and let down the (trammel) nets" which had already been washed and hung up to dry. Peter protested that this was pointless: the nets weren't useful in deep water, or in the daytime and this would require re-washing the nets; but he did so anyway. Having done so, Peter encountered such a catch that (1) the net started to break, (2) the boat almost sank due to the weight of the catch, and (3) Peter had to call James and John over to help, and filled both boats. The Gospel lesson account was especially remarkable because the fish can see the nets during the daytime and can easily escape entanglement.

Comparing a similar catch they encountered under similar circumstances following the Resurrection, they caught 153 large fish (John 21:1-12). These fish from John 21:11 were

³ For more information, see Biblical Archaeology Review, Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 46-56.

probably the musht since they were caught near shore (100 yards out); the haul was then around 600 pounds of fish, figuring an average of four pounds each.

Since the catch in our Gospel lesson was taken in deep water (Luke 5:4), it was probably a school of large barbel. In John 21, the 153 fish are referred to as “a multitude of fish” (Luke 5:6) and “full of large fish” (Luke 5:11). The quantity of the catch is referred to as “a great number of fish” (Luke 5:6). The net did not break in John 21 (although the catch was large) but the net did start breaking in Luke 5. If there were also around 150 fish in the Luke 5 catch, this would represent about a ton of fish, figuring 10-15 pounds per barbel. To get a better idea of the quantity of fish, these boats were the same ones that the Twelve rowed across the Sea of Galilee during a storm in Mark 4:36-38. In order to work at night to lay nets that are hundreds of feet long, the boat was a larger-than-average rowboat. There was probably room for at least six adults plus space for Jesus to sleep. This means that the boat could probably carry over 1,000 pounds of fish plus two crewmembers. Since both boats were filled to the point of almost sinking (Luke 5:7) this represented quite a haul! Especially since a good night’s catch (working all night, letting down the nets 12-15 times) was only about 200 pounds.

Peter, Andrew, James, John and the rest of the crew were understandably astonished at the size of the catch especially coming in the daytime. Peter’s remark “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!” is reminiscent of that of Isaiah after having seen the Lord in His temple (Isaiah 6:1-7). Many times, the closer we get to the Lord, the more we realize our own sinfulness. From the Lord’s reply, “Do not be afraid”, there was more than just simple surprise but some fear and trembling also at the magnitude of the Lord’s miracle. One might note Peter’s progression over the course of the Gospel lesson from calling Jesus “Master” (Luke 5:5) to calling Him “Lord” (Luke 5:8).

Some of the Twelve had been called earlier, but as disciples, not as Apostles. From the Gospel account, they wouldn’t just go out into deep water and let down their nets for a stranger, especially being tired after fishing all night and just having finished cleaning their nets. We get some insight into the earlier calling of these same four Apostles by Jesus (John 1:43-51), where they were still part-time fishermen at that time. After the calling of today’s Gospel lesson, they left everything (Luke 5:11) and were soon sent out by themselves to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons (Luke 9:1-10). The earlier calling (John 1:43-51) is used in the Eastern lectionary for the First Sunday in Lent and focuses on the calling of Nathanael. The calling of the rest of the Twelve Apostles took place shortly after today’s Gospel lesson where the Lord put His team all together (Luke 6:12-16).

Tertullian pointed out⁴ that the Prophet Jeremiah had predicted the calling of the fishermen as Apostles. When the fishermen left their nets, they understood that this was what Jeremiah had predicted.

“Out of so many kinds of occupations, why did Christ have such respect for that of fishermen, as to select from it for Apostles Simon, his brother and the sons of Zebedee? For this account was not written down just to bring out Peter’s trembling at the very large catch of fish, where the Lord’s response was, ‘Do not be afraid! From now on you will catch men’ (Luke 5:10). By saying this, He

⁴ Tertullian, The Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 9.

suggested to them the meaning of the prophecy, that it was He who by Jeremiah had foretold, ‘Behold, I will send many fishermen; and they shall fish them’ (Jeremiah 16:16), that is, men. When they left their boats and followed Him, they understood that it was He who had begun to accomplish what He had declared by Jeremiah”.

The Humility of the Apostles

The beginning of the work of the Twelve Apostles was characterized by a deep humility and awe at what the Master could do. This kind of humility was also characteristic throughout the Early Church where people did good works without seeking credit for it. John Chrysostom described⁵ Peter’s humble words, “Depart from me” (Luke 5:8), as the foundation of a blessed walk with God. As we apply this attitude to all aspects of our life and work, we will find ourselves praised by God and man.

“Let us beware of saying anything about ourselves, for this renders us both odious with men and abominable to God. For this reason, the greater the good works we do, the less let us say of ourselves; this being the way to reap the greatest praise both with men and with God. Demand not a reward that you may receive a reward. Confess yourself to be saved by grace, that He may profess Himself a debtor to you; and not for your good works only, but also for such rightness of mind”.

“For when we do good works, we have Him debtor not for our good works only; but when we do not think we have done any good work (), then this disposition itself is equivalent to good works. For should this be absent, good works will not appear great! In the same way, when we have servants (Luke 17:10), we should most approve them when, after having performed all their service with good will, they do not think they have done anything great. It was in this way that the centurion said, ‘I am not fit that you should enter under my roof’; because of this, he became worthy, and was ‘marveled at’ above all Jews (Matthew 8:8-10). In the same manner, Paul said, ‘I am the least of the apostles’ (1 Corinthians 15:9); because of this he came to be regarded first of all. So likewise John the Baptist: ‘I am not fit to loose the latchet of His shoe’ (Mark 1:7). Because of this he was the ‘friend of the Bridegroom’ (John 3:29), and the hand which he affirmed to be unworthy to touch His shoes, this did Christ draw onto His own head⁶. So Peter said, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man’ (Luke 5:8); because of this he became a foundation of the Church”.

“For nothing is so acceptable to God as to number one’s self with the last. This is a first principle of all practical wisdom. For he that is humbled, and bruised in heart, will not be vainglorious, wrathful, envious of his neighbor, and will not harbor any other passion. For if a man, by mourning for things pertaining to this life, drives out all the diseases of his soul, much more will he, who mourns for sins, enjoy the blessing of self-restraint”.

John Chrysostom also stated⁷ that our life is like living in a foreign country, where the Lord’s Presence is our real home. If someone were to repay us a debt, it would be better for us

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, III, 8.

⁶ Alluding to the laying on of hands at Jesus’ baptism from Matthew 3:14-15.

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, v. 31.

to receive it at home, not away from home. Yet even in this life we will receive a hundred-fold. The Apostles gave up everything, and the result was that the world opened their homes to them.

“If anyone were to owe you gold, while you were staying in a foreign country, and you had neither servants, nor any means to convey it across to the place of your abode, if he were to promise to pay you the loan, you would ask him to have it paid down not in the foreign land, but at home. In the same fashion, do you think it would be right to receive those spiritual and unutterable things in this world? This would be madness! For if you received them here, you would have them corruptible certainly; but if you wait for that time, He will repay you them incorruptible. If you receive here, you get lead; but if you get them there, it would be refined gold. Still He does not deprive you of the goods of this life. For along with that promise He has placed another also, to the following effect. Everyone that loves the things of the world to come, shall receive ‘a hundred-fold in this life present, and shall inherit eternal life’ (Matthew 19:29). If then we do not receive the hundred-fold, it is ourselves that are to blame for not lending to Him, Who can give so much; for all who have given have received much, even though they gave but little. For what great thing did Peter give? A broken net (Luke 5:6, 11), and a rod and a hook only! Yet still God opened to him the houses of the world, and spread before him land and sea, and all men invited him to their home. Or rather they sold what was their own, and brought it to the Apostles’ feet, not so much as putting it into their hands, so great was the honor they paid him”.

The significance of the Twelve Apostles is brought out by the question the Twelve asked Jesus: “What shall they have after having left all to follow him?” (Matthew 19:27) Jesus replied that they “will sit on twelve thrones judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

When Jesus first called the four Apostles (John 1:42), He prophesied that Peter would be called Cephas, meaning a rock or stone. Cephas is a name that comes from the Chaldean word “*kafe*” meaning rock; “*petra*” is the Greek counterpart meaning a large rock.

A little over a year after the four were called, following the death of John the Baptist, Jesus made His famous statement about the Church and how the Gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). This was in response to Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:17), which is the “rock” that Jesus had spoken of earlier. Jesus went on to say that He would give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Twelve. Whatever they bind on earth shall be, having been bound in heaven. And whatever they loose on earth shall be, having been loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19). The Twelve, who have established the foundation of the Church (Revelation 21:14) with Christ as the Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), have already begun to judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel and have been doing so now for almost two millennia. The Church today is responsible before God to maintain the connection with the Twelve and the Cornerstone in order that this just judgment may continue for our benefit⁸. In doing this, the Church helps us to focus on loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength, and our neighbor as our self.

⁸ This theme occurs again in mid-July when the Orthodox lectionary remembers the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils.

And by doing that, we will obtain a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ as we pray in the various services.

Figure 1
Use of a Dragnet or Seine

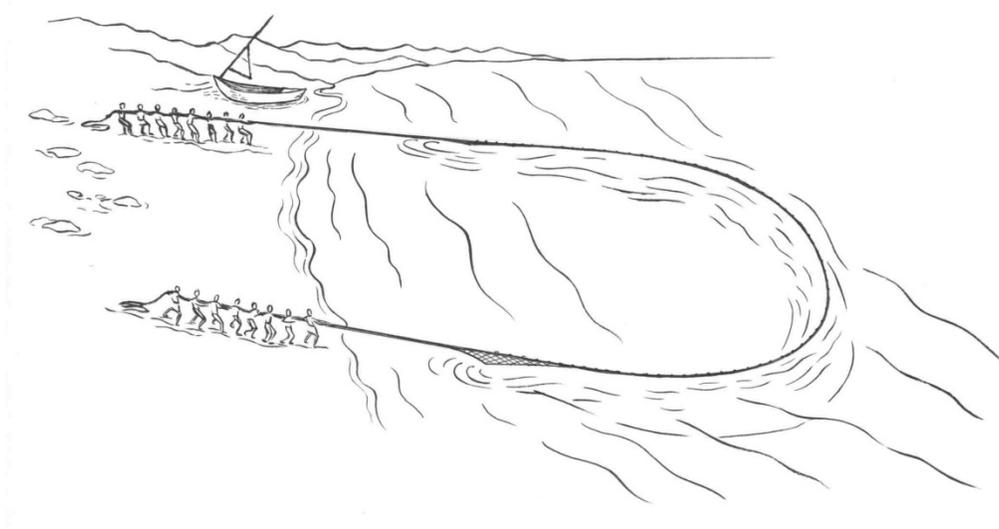
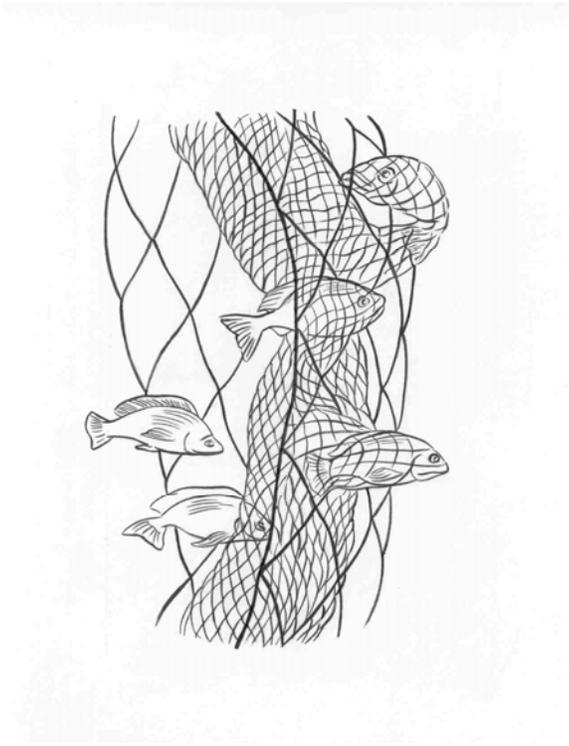


Figure 2
Use of a Cast Net



Figure 3
The Webbing of a Trammel Net



TREASURE IN VESSELS OF CLAY

September 25, 2011
15th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

EPISTLE: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Today's Epistle reading is used variously on the 4th Sunday after Pentecost or half of it on Transfiguration Sunday and the other half on the 4th Sunday after Easter.

BACKGROUND FOR THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

Paul founded the Church in Corinth about 51 AD toward the end of his Second Missionary Journey and stayed there a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Silas was traveling with Paul at the time along with Luke, Timothy and Andronicus, where all but Paul were of the original Seventy. Luke was left behind to oversee the Macedonian Churches. (Note switch in tenses from "we" to "they" and back to "we" in Acts 16:16, 17:1, 20:6). Silas was left behind in Corinth and was later Bishop of Corinth. (Note that we never hear from Silas again traveling with Paul after he arrived in Corinth, Acts 18:5).

Before Paul arrived in Corinth for an extended stay again in late 55 AD, he wrote four letters to Corinth (two of which are lost) and paid the Church one brief visit. For more details of this see the Epistle lesson for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost. In the interval from 52 to 55 AD, Apollos and the Apostle Peter visited Corinth. Apollos was one of the original Seventy, but must have been back home in Alexandria at the time of Pentecost. He knew only the baptism of John in 53 AD when he came to Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28). Aquila and Priscilla, the overseers Paul left in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), straightened Apollos out and also wrote to the Churches in Achaia (Athens and Corinth) to receive Apollos when he arrived (Acts 18:27). Apollos proceeded to help out by vigorously refuting the Jews publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:28). In the chapter just prior to our Epistle reading (1 Corinthians 3:8), Paul said that he and Apollos are one; that is, of one mind in the work of establishing the Churches.

The same can be said for the relationship between Paul and Peter. Peter visited Corinth in the early 50's AD on his way to Rome. He obviously made a big impression in Corinth since there were factions that had developed by 55 AD (1 Corinthians 1:12) centered around Paul, Apollos, Peter and none of the above (i.e. Christ)!! On Peter's way to Corinth, Paul met him in Macedonia and together they ordained four bishops:

Olympas	for	Philippi
Jason	for	Thessalonica
Silas	for	Corinth
Herodion	for	Patras (SW Greece)

Thus we can definitely say that Peter and Paul were one in the work also.

From a detailed study of Paul's Missionary Journeys, one can see that Paul worked with at least 60 of the original members of the 70 at some point. For more details, see Appendix A. Many of them like Luke, Timothy, and Titus traveled with him a lot. In addition, Paul had some contact with Peter, John, Andrew and Philip.

EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

The Imagery of Gold and Precious Stones

The Garden of Eden: In and around the Garden of Eden, gold and some precious stones are mentioned: bdellium and onyx (Genesis 2:10-13). The implication is that they are just raw materials, however.

The Ephod: As part of the ephod or garment worn by Aaron the priest, were two large onyx gem stones with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel engraved on them (Exodus 28:9-12).

The Breastpiece: The breastpiece of judgment, actually a pocket or pouch, that contained the Urim and Thummin (meaning "lights and truth") had an embroidered face and held 12 large gems representing the 12 tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). Aaron continually carried the verdict or judgment of the sons of Israel before the Lord. This verdict was already given on the Altar of Burnt offering as part of Aaron's preparation (Exodus 28:29-30).

The New Jerusalem: The light of the New Jerusalem was like a precious stone. The gates were twelve pearls, on which were inscribed the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The foundations were 12 precious stones on which are written the names of the Twelve Apostles (Revelation 21:10-21).

The Church Today: Paul was speaking of building with various materials: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw. In 1 Corinthians 3:17, the building is said to be the temple of God. Part of the building process is a fire test — this is part of the Word of the Cross (1 Corinthians 3:10-17).

We have a treasure in dirt (clay) vessels (2 Corinthians 4:6-9). The treasure is like the proverbial sword in the fire. The treasure is the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6). As we carry our cross, the sword heats up and we begin to take on the image of God (v.4), which is the fire. This process is referred to as deification where we begin to become God-like. The words printed on icons of St. Athanasius reflect this: God became man that man might become god.

There will be tribulations in our lives, but this is just part of the process that refines the gold and cuts the precious stones. As we go on, we die a little more each day to our self-centeredness and death is working in us. The more this happens, the more we are aware of the will of God and grace and thanksgiving abound to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:8-15).

The result is that Christians have been a unique people. Consider the First Century writing of an unknown author describing Christians of his day: “For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor [are they]...the advocates of merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives as to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking manner of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry ... beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring [literally, “cast away fetuses”]. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time, surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless [2 Corinthians 4:12]; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as though quickened to life; they are assigned by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred” (The Epistle to Diognetus, Chapter 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers).

What Happens to the Earthenware Vessel?

But yet a very real problem that the Church has had to address over the centuries is: “What happens to the clay vessel?” Gnostics in the First Century quoted Paul as saying that “...flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). Therefore, they said, the flesh and blood doesn’t matter and only spiritual things matter. The Apostle John vehemently opposed this idea (which was championed by ex-deacon Nicolas of Acts 6:5) regarding the gnostic Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 14-15).

In the same context as the above, Paul stated regarding the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52-54):

- The dead will be raised
- We shall be changed
- The corruptible must put on incorruption
- The mortal must put on immortality
- Death will be swallowed up in victory

The Gnostics stated that the resurrection was already past (2 Timothy 2:17-18) and occurred at baptism. Paul vehemently opposed this and even delivered some Gnostics over to Satan (for the destruction of their flesh) in order that they may learn not to blaspheme in this regard (1 Timothy 1:18-20; compare 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

The Scriptures teach that in the resurrection the righteous will shine forth like the sun (Matthew 13:43, Daniel 12:3) and that we will be like Him (1 John 3:2) who is the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15-18, Revelation 1:5). And when the resurrected Christ appeared to the Apostles in the upper room, He pointed out to them specifically that He was not just spirit but that He retained flesh and bones in His resurrected state (Luke 24:38-39). There was probably something different about the risen Jesus' appearance. The Apostles didn't dare ask the risen Jesus who He was when He appeared to them in Galilee (John 21:12); Luke and Cleopas didn't recognize Him at all for a while on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). There was undoubtedly something different when the corruptible put on incorruption and the mortal put on immortality. It was changed (1 Corinthians 15:52-54). But yet it was still recognizable on closer inspection.

The Role of the Clay Vessels

So what is the proper role of our fleshly bodies in this life? Irenaeus (2nd Century) quotes Paul using these words with respect to our fleshly bodies: "Paul declares that we are 'always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, that also the life of Jesus Christ might be manifested in our body. For if we who live are delivered into death for Jesus' sake, it is that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh' [2 Corinthians 4:10-11]. And that the Spirit lays hold of the flesh, he says in the same Epistle: 'That ye are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart' [2 Corinthians 3:3]. If, therefore, in the present time fleshly hearts are made partakers of the Spirit, what is there astonishing if, in the resurrection, they receive that life which is granted by the Spirit? Of this resurrection the Apostle speaks in the Epistle to the Philippians: 'Having been made conformable to His death, if by any means I might attain to the resurrection which is from the dead' [Philippians 3:11]. In what other mortal flesh, therefore, can life be understood, unless in that substance which is also put to death on account of that confession which is made of God. He, Himself has declared: 'If, as a man, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise? For if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen. Now, if Christ has not risen, our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. In that case, we are found to be false witnesses for God, since we testified that He raised up Christ. For if the dead do not rise, neither has Christ risen. But if Christ is not risen, your faith is in vain, since ye are yet in your sins. Therefore those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are more miserable than all men. But now Christ has risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those that sleep; for as by man [came] death, by man also [came] the resurrection of the dead' " [1 Corinthians 15:13-21].

"In all these passages, as I have already said, these men (i.e. the heretics) must either allege that the apostle expresses opinions contradicting himself with respect to that statement 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 15:50); or on the other hand, they will be forced to make perverse and crooked interpretations of all the passages, so as to overturn and alter the sense of the words: (Against Heresies, Book V, chapter 13, 4).

All this was put into place when the Lord created Adam and Eve. Not only were they created in the Image of God, but the Epistle text states that God commanded light to shine out of

darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6). John Chrysostom (4th Century) comments on this: “And where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the creation; for, says He, ‘Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And God said, let there be light, and there was light’ (Genesis 1:2, 3). Then, He said: ‘Let it be, and it was’; but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us. For He did not say, ‘has now commanded light’, but ‘has Himself shined’ (v.6). Therefore, neither do we see tangible objects by the shining of this light, but we see God Himself through Christ. For of the Spirit, he says (2 Corinthians 3:18): ‘But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord Spirit’. And of the Son, (2 Corinthians 4:4): ‘That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.’ And of the Father (2 Corinthians 4:6): ‘He that said Light shall shine out of darkness shined in your hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ “.

“For seeing he had spoken many and great things of the unspeakable glory, lest any should say: ‘And how enjoying so great a glory can we remain in a mortal body?’ he said that this very thing is indeed the chief marvel and a very great example of the power of God, that an earthen vessel has been enabled to bear so great a brightness and to keep so high a treasure. None of the things we hold is human!” (Homily viii on 2 Corinthians 4).

“And what is the ‘dying of the Lord Jesus,’ which they bore about? Their daily deaths by which also the resurrection was shown, ‘For if anyone doesn’t believe’, Paul says, ‘that Jesus died and rose again, beholding us every day die and rise again, let him believe henceforward in the resurrection. His life is manifested in our body’ (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). By snatching us out of the perils, that which seems a mark of weakness and being destitute proclaims His resurrection. His power had appeared in that we suffered, but without being overcome. We bear His dying that the power of His life may be made manifest, who did not permit mortal flesh to be overcome by the snowstorm of these calamities” (Homily ix on 2 Corinthians 4).

Attempts to Link the Earthen to the Heavenly

All this is so utterly unfathomable and glorious that there have been attempts in the past to water it down, sometimes by deceit. For example, in the 4th Century, the words of the Nicene Creed were carefully drafted to refute the attempts of the Arian bishops to craft Jesus more in our image rather than vice versa. The words co-essential and consubstantial were used to distinguish the nature of Jesus’ divinity from the nature of Jesus’ flesh — which is the same as ours.

Athanasius of Alexandria (4th Century) put it in these words: “When the Bishops said that the Word must be described as the True Power and image of the Father, in all things exact and like the Father, and as unalterable, and as always, and as in Him without division (for never was the Word not, but He was always, existing everlastingly with the Father, as the radiance of light), Eusebius [an Arian bishop] and his fellows endured indeed, as not daring to contradict, being put to shame by the arguments which were urged against them; but withal they were caught whispering to each other and winking with their eyes [at the Council], that ‘like’, and ‘always’, and ‘power’, and ‘in Him’, were, as before, common to us and the Son and that it was no difficulty to agree to these. As to ‘like’, they said it was written of us, ‘Man is the image and glory of God’ [1 Corinthians 11:7]; ‘always’, that it was written, ‘for we which live are always’

[2 Corinthians 4:11]; ‘in Him’, ‘in Him we live and move and have our being’ [Acts 17:28]...as to ‘power’, that the caterpillar and the locust are called ‘power’ and ‘great power’ [Joel 2:25], and that it is often said of the people, for instance, ‘all the power of the Lord came out of the land of Egypt’ [Exodus 12:41]; and there are others also, heavenly ones, for Scripture says, ‘the Lord of powers is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge’ [Psalms 46:7]...But the Bishops discerning in this too their dissimulation, and whereas it is written, ‘deceit is in the heart of the irreligious that imagine evil’ [Proverbs 12:20], were again compelled on their part to collect the sense of the Scriptures, and to re-say ... more distinctly still, namely, that the Son is ‘one in essence’ with the Father, by way of saying, that the Son was from the Father, and not merely like, but the same in likeness, and of showing that the Son’s likeness and unalterableness was different from such copy of the same as is ascribed to us, which we acquire from virtue on the ground of observance of the commandments. For bodies which are like each other may be separated and become at distances from each other, as are human sons relative to their parents ... but since the generation of the Son from the Father is not according to the nature of men, and not only like, but inseparable from the essence of the Father, and He and the Father are one, as He has said Himself [John 8:58, 10:30], and the Word is ever in the Father and the Father in the Word, as the radiance stands towards the light ... therefore the Council, as understanding this, suitably wrote ‘one in essence’, that they might defeat the perverseness of the heretics, and show that the Word was other than the originated things. For, after thus writing, they at once added, ‘they who say that the Son of God is from nothing, or created, or alterable, or a work, or from other essence, these the Holy Catholic Church anathematized’ “ (Athanasius’ Defense of the Nicene Definition. The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers).