

THE PROPHET

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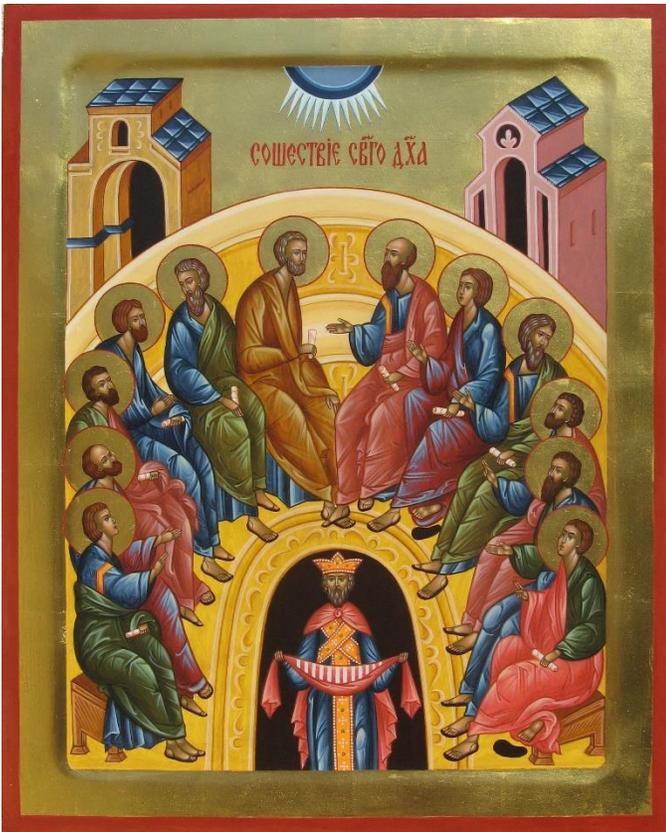
His Eminence, Most Rev. Melchisedek

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June 2021



*The Descent of the Holy Spirit
(Pentecost)*

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RECTOR'S REPORT:

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

In the month of June, we are blessed to celebrate two of the greatest feasts of the Orthodox Church: those of the Ascension of Christ – from earth to heaven – and of the Descent of the Holy Spirit – from heaven to earth.

Together, these feasts are the fulfillment of everything we celebrated over the course of Lent and Pascha: Christ ascends to heaven, bearing our flesh, where *OUR* humanity is glorified at the right hand of God the Father. This is our destination as Christians: our high calling to be like Christ. However, we are not left alone in this task, for God Himself – the Holy Spirit – comes down to be with us and to help and guide us along the way.

Given the liturgical exhaustion of Lent, Holy Week, and Pascha, it can be tempting to let these two feasts pass us by, but these are events of the utmost importance in salvation history, and they should not be neglected by us Christians, us followers of Christ. As we begin our summer pastimes, let us not forget to make time for our continued life in Christ by means of these two wonderful feasts of the Church.

In Christ, with thanks and love,
Fr. John Joseph Kotalik IV, **Rector**

MEMORY ETERNAL:**(Въчная память!)****We continue our 40 days of prayer for:**

Apr. Nilus Lerro (4/28)

We commemorate the anniversaries of:

Evelyn Telesko (6/1/2020)

Dn. John Chobany (6/2/2000)

Stanley Kerkentzes (6/2/2000)

Charles Sweda (6/4/2017)

Joseph Pashkevich (6/5/1919)

Helen Alterio (6/5/2001)

Peter Kushnerov (6/7/1920)

Theodore Kolchak (6/7/1920)

Joseph Kilshin (6/7/1922)

George Telesko (6/7/2007)

Stephen Torgan (6/8/1924)

Raymond Altieri (6/8/1950)

Anna Turlock (6/8/1993)

Anna Pastrick (6/8/1999)

Anna Turko (6/9/1975)

Daniel Chicarella (6/9/1977)

Anna Tucock (6/9/1998)

Taras Pashkevich (6/10/1927)

Daniel Kotyk (6/10/1952)

Mary Behun (6/10/1979)

Michael Tomechko (6/11/1927)

Vasily Soroka (6/12/1927)

Mat. Barbara Oleynik (6/12/2017)

Michael Zubenko (6/13/1960)

Milovan Dalevich (6/14/1925)

Helen Uram (6/15/1996)

Gertrude Naidenoff (6/15/1990)

Mary Sandalla (6/16/1957)

Joseph Orlosky (6/17/1978)

Mary Sweda (6/18/1974)

Mary Sakovich (6/18/2005)

Basil Sweda (6/19/1974)

Andrew Chopak (6/19/2006)

Dorothy Matyuf (6/19/2018)

John Borschov (6/20/1920)

Wasył Bushkewitz (6/20/1948)

Nadezhda Udodow (6/20/1974)

John Haverlack (6/20/2008)

Julia Pali (6/21/1947)

John Lazorchak (6/21/1950)

Charles Martin (6/21/1996)

Borislav Zhidagorich (6/22/1923)

Anna Kotyk (6/23/2015)

Vasily Chizhmody (6/24/1938)

Steven Blyshak (6/24/1944)

John Yarosh (6/25/1942)

Albert Abraham (6/25/1975)

John Borsos (6/27/1969)

Paul Vargo (6/27/2013)

Gabrielle Cronin (6/27/2019)

Stephen Sahyda (6/28/1970)

Joseph Saudella (6/29/1967)

Thomas Haverlack (6/30/1966)

Dolores Bizick (6/30/2006)

MANY YEARS:**(Многая и благая лѣта!)****Namedays:**

Kevin Reck (6/3)

Kevin Rudolph (6/3)

Kyra Schenken (6/6)

Jerry Strennen (6/15)

Jude Killmeyer (6/19)

John Petronka (6/24)

John Simko, Jr. (6/24)

Pete Petronka (6/29)

Birthdays:

Kevin Reck (6/2)

Joseph Zupancic (6/6)

Ellie Ruffing (6/8)

Robert Kalakewich (6/9)

Katherine Ruffing (6/10)

Kingston James Eismont (6/11)

Paula Phillis (6/12)

Lilah Ruffing (6/16)

Kathleen Signorini (6/16)

Emmanuelle Paradise (6/18)

Dennis Sweda (6/19)

Mary Ann Zupancic (6/20)

Kevin Rudolph (6/22)

Marcie Killmeyer (6/23)

Darcie Burkholder (6/24)

Melissa Ruffing (6/28)

Wedding Anniversaries:

Pdn. John & Mat. Myra Oleynik (6/3/1984)

David & Leah Stockman (6/13/1998)

Alfred & Beverly Davis (6/20/1970)

Richard & Aimee Eismont (6/24)

Anniversary of Consecration:

His Eminence, Abp. Melchisedek (6/27/2009)

*If you or a loved one are missing, please let
Fr. John know so that we can correct our records!*

Recovering a Full Theological Vision of the Ascension

by Hieromonk Herman (Majkrzak), June 2, 2016

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. — John 12:32

Ascension Day is possibly the most forgotten of the great feasts of the Lord. Why? In part because, unlike all the other feasts of the same rank, it can never fall on a Saturday or Sunday. Forty days after Pascha is always a Thursday, and midweek services during the Paschal season are not very popular.

Not only is this feast neglected, though, it is often mischaracterized as one of *emptiness*, a feast of absence and waiting. It is sometimes described, even in sermons and articles, as an “in-between” feast, an awkward nine days in which, while we must sadly give up the triumphant hymns of Pascha, still we are not yet granted the verdant warmth of the Holy Spirit. It’s seen as a corridor joining two spacious and beautiful halls, but itself containing little that is noteworthy, aside from the virtues of patience and hope.

To be sure, this is a feast of patience and hope. The hymns in the *Pentecostarion* [the book of hymns for Paschaltide and Pentecost] bear witness to this, as do the parting words of the Lord to his disciples: “Stay in Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk. 24:49). Yet according to the Scriptures, they returned to Jerusalem “with great joy” (*ibid.*, v. 52). Theirs was not the sorrow of abandoned children but the joy of those who knew their master to be exalted and glorified, who saw the resurrection take on a greater fullness than it had had during the forty days since Christ’s arising.

Enlightened by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostles came to see the Ascension as the key that opens up the mystery of our salvation. They preached and wrote about it constantly. But in the Church today it is referred to rarely if ever throughout the year. We will take the Apostles as our guides as we endeavor to enrich our somewhat meager conception of this great act of redemption.

I

“...He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.” The Ascension is not only a feast commemorating a past event, it is also a dogma which all the baptized are duty-bound to profess.

This is made explicit in the Creed, and in that text it is coupled with an earlier phrase: “He came down from heaven ... and became man.” As God, he descended from heaven and took on human nature, and as Man, he ascended to his Father and sat down next to him. The Psalmist sings of this in prophecy: “Coming forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, he rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. His going forth is from the uttermost part of heaven, and his circuit even unto the end of it again” (Ps. 18:6-7). St. Paul speaks of the same “circuit”: “In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the same who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:9-10).

It is no exaggeration to say that the feasts of Annunciation and Christmas have their exact counterpart and, indeed, their fulfillment in the Ascension. Christ united himself to our nature in order to raise us up to God. The Word became flesh and made his home among men, but through the Ascension, “the head of our human race is at home, where only God is at home.” (*Fr. Patrick Reardon, From a sermon recorded on the Sunday after the Ascension*) And he ascended, not to abandon the earth—much less his flesh—but to fill all things with himself.

The eternal Word of God took on our human substance in order to become the “firstborn of many brethren,” in whom we are all adopted as children of God (*cf.* Rom. 8:16, 8:29). As the first-born, in obedience to the Law, forty days after his birth from the Holy Virgin the infant Jesus was presented at the earthly Temple of his Father, where two turtledoves were sacrificed in his stead (Lk. 2:24). Likewise, forty days after his Resurrection, having given himself over to death, Christ, the “firstborn from the dead,” offered himself and all his sufferings before the throne of his Father in heaven, so that, “as the head of the body, he might in all things have the preeminence” (*cf.* Col. 1:18).

II

We thus see in the Ascension the ultimate goal of the Incarnation, the completion of the work begun at Christmas. But we can say more: it is the fulfillment of *Holy Friday* as well. The Ascension to heaven is the final priestly act of the sacrifice made upon the Cross.

But is not the *Resurrection* the perfect fulfillment of the Cross? Yes, in at least one sense: the Resurrection shows that by submitting to humiliation, Christ was raised to incorruptible glory; that by submitting to the judgment of sinful men, Christ was vindicated as “the only Sinless One;” that by submitting to death, Christ won the victory over death. This description of the Cross as *kenosis*—the divine self-emptying that paradoxically results in exaltation—is a central motif in the Orthodox approach to the Cross and the Resurrection. However, the theological vision of the Apostles and Fathers is not exhausted by this theme alone. (*For a brief discussion of predominant “theories of the Atonement” in modern Orthodox theology, see Matthew Baker, “Atonement in the Theology of Fr. Georges Florovsky,” in Matthew Baker, Seraphim Danckaert, and Nicholas Marinides, eds., On the Tree of the Cross, Jordanville: Holy Trinity Publications, 2016, especially pp. 121–126*). The Cross is first of all the perfect sacrifice made on our behalf to God the Father: the Guiltless One suffering for the guilty, and so reconciling them to God. In the words of St. Gregory Palamas:

Christ overturned the devil through suffering and his flesh which he offered as a sacrifice to the Father, as a pure and altogether holy victim—how great is his gift!—and reconciled God to our human race ... Since he gave his blood, which was sinless and therefore guiltless, as a ransom for us who were liable to punishment because of our sins, he redeemed us from our guilt.

(*Homily 16.24, 31; Christopher Veniamin, trans. Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies 2nd ed., Waymart: Mount Thabor Publishing, 2016, pp. 125, 128–9.*)

The late Fr. Matthew Baker notes that in much Orthodox theology of the twentieth century, “understanding of traditional atonement language has been obscured by confessional polemics and by the influence of modern existentialism, with its antinomian tendencies.” (*Baker, ibid., pp. 124–125*). Recovering a full theology of the Ascension requires a corrective, because so much depends on Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood and sacrifices.

In the Old Covenant, the high priest entered once a year into the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle

(later, the Temple), to offer the blood of a bullock and a goat (*cf. Leviticus 16*). He offered only the *blood*: the rest of the sacrifice was burnt outside the camp (*Lev. 16:27; cf. Heb. 13:13*). These actions prefigured and prepared for the perfect High Priesthood of Christ. Sacrificed outside the city walls of Jerusalem, his priestly work was not completed until he entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (*Heb. 9:24*), “taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (*ibid., v. 12*). Christ’s Ascension to heaven is thus the completion of his priestly office begun on the Cross. Bringing his own lifeblood—the human blood he took from his Mother, the daughter of Adam and Eve—he made the offering of human life which Adam failed to make in Eden. Mankind is saved not simply by the shedding of Christ’s Blood on Calvary, but by the presentation of that Blood in intercession for us before the Throne of God. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (*1 Tim. 2:5–6*).

The Apostle’s emphasis here on Christ’s Manhood and on his priestly mediation on behalf of men before the Father are accents not stressed in much Eastern theology and hymnography in the aftermath of the Arian heresy, given the pressing need to safeguard the Orthodox teaching of Christ’s perfect Divinity and consubstantiality with the Father. But these themes were never entirely lost, since they are eminently Scriptural and Patristic, and rediscovering them is key to our full understanding of the Ascension.

III

Christ is both Priest and Victim. He offers the sacrifice, and he is the sacrifice. “Entering into heaven itself,” Jesus’s Blood speaks “more graciously than that of Abel” (*Heb. 12:24*). As Priest, he carries the sacrificial Blood with him not in a vessel, but in his own resurrected and glorified Body, the wounds in his hands and feet and side shining in splendid testimony to his having drained the cup of death. “Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he that is glorious in his apparel?” In these words from the second reading appointed for Ascension Vespers, Isaiah speaks in prophecy of the Angels’ wonder when they see

their Master return to heaven, not only bearing human flesh, but bearing also the marks of his Passion. He answers them: “I speak of righteousness and saving judgment. I am full of trodden grape, I have trodden the wine press utterly alone, and from the peoples no one was with me” (Is. 63:1-3).

St. John the Theologian, in his vision on Patmos, saw “a Lamb, as though it had been slain,” standing at the throne (cf. Rev. 5:6). This selfsame Lamb is present on the altars of our churches, “as on a cherubic throne,” (*Presanctified Liturgy, the Prayer after the Great Entrance*) because the Divine Eucharist makes present, in particular places on earth, the mystery of the one Priesthood of Christ and his perpetual mediation for us in heaven. By calling the Liturgy a sacrifice, we do not mean that the one, unique, and perfect sacrifice of the Cross could be repeated (cf. Heb. 10:10-18), but that in the Liturgy our offerings of bread and wine—of our lives and livelihoods—are united to that one perfect Sacrifice, which is made present to us. In this way Christ unites us to himself, as the body to the head, and presents us to his Father, who, in him, has become our Father as well.

With Christ and in Christ, then, the Divine Liturgy brings us sinners before the throne of God. The Church, writes Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, “ascends to heaven, where the Eucharist is celebrated.” And this is so because “Christ has ascended to heaven, and his altar is ‘sacred and spiritual.’” (*Alexander Schmemmann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom, Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987, p. 60.*)

It is the table at which Christ gathers us, and it is the sacrificial table that unites the high priest and the sacrifice. It is the throne of the King and Lord. It is heaven, that kingdom in which “God is all in all.” ... And therefore the [little] entrance, the drawing near to the altar, is always an ascent. (*Ibid.*)

Here Fr Schmemmann is drawing on ancient mystagogy surrounding the little entrance. St. Maximus the Confessor, commenting on the bishop’s “entrance into the sanctuary and ascent to the priestly throne,” calls this a figure of Christ’s “ascension into heaven and return to the heavenly throne.” (*Maximus Confessor. Mystagogy, in Selected Writings. New York: Paulist Press, 1985, p. 198.*) And in the following century, St. Germanus of Constantinople

expands this image: the bishop’s ascent to the throne at the high place signifies Christ’s completion of the economy of salvation, and his sitting down while still wearing the woolen omophorion—the symbol of Christ’s taking on human nature as a shepherd takes a sheep upon his shoulders—shows that Christ sat down on the Throne of the Godhead retaining his human nature. (*Germanus of Constantinople. On the Divine Liturgy. Paul Meyendorff, translator. Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s, 1984, paragraph 24.*)

When the bishop or priest enters the sanctuary at the Divine Liturgy, he is acting in his role as head of the community, because he is an icon of Christ. Where the Head is, there also is the Body. In ascending from the Mount of Olives into heaven, Christ, who is for all eternity consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit, also remains consubstantial with the race of men. He retains his human nature and thus could say to his disciples: “I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn 14:3). In the Liturgy, and ultimately in the Age to Come, we are given a way to approach God with boldness, “a new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh” (Heb. 10:20). Remaining disciples of the ascended Christ thus involves a challenge: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1-2). So it is our task to “lift up our hearts” not only during the Liturgy but throughout our daily lives.

IV

This is challenging, among other reasons, because in this life we are not yet able to see perfectly. We know that Christ is the *Way* to the fullness of life, but the *destination* has not been fully revealed. Christ, by his flesh, has made a way into the Holy of Holies, but “the cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). And thus also in our churches, the altar is veiled, the sanctuary is hidden. But the iconostasis at the same time reveals, allowing us to perceive more deeply than we could without it.

Without the cloud, what might the disciples have seen? Would they have seen their Master become smaller and smaller, like an airplane, and then finally disappear? The cloud showed them something greater, though harder to understand: the Throne to which Christ was exalted is not a place

relative to our location in space. We moderns might suppose that the Apostles and Fathers couldn't have understood this, never having peered into vast galaxies without seeing anywhere the Throne of God.

But this question – where is heaven? – preexists modern space exploration by centuries. “We do not hold that the right hand of the Father is an actual place,” wrote St. John Damascene in the seventh century. “For how could he that is uncircumscribed have a right hand limited by place?” (*On the Orthodox Faith*, 4.2. Quoted in Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology*, New York: T&T Clark, 2011, pp. 44–45). Yet at the same time the Church insists that Christ remained and remains fully human. Saint Damascene again: “His ascent from earth to heaven, and again, his descent from heaven to earth, are manifestations of the energies of his circumscribed body.” (*Ibid.*) Here, then, is a difficulty which the mind of man simply cannot resolve. As Douglas Farrow puts it: “in going to this place which is not a place, Jesus ... remains who and what he is, a specific human creature to whom God affords time and space and whose bodily return we await.” (*Ibid.*)

Christ's human body, now hidden from our physical eyes for a time, will be revealed again in majesty when he comes again as Judge. The angels made this clear to the Apostles as they stood gazing up into the sky that first Ascension Day (*cf.* Acts 1:11). When he returns, still bearing the marks of his Passion, those who loved darkness rather than light “shall look on him whom they pierced,” and shall mourn (*cf.* Zech. 12:10). The Second Coming, followed by the Universal Resurrection of every human being, the Judgment, and the inauguration of the Age to Come – this will be the final triumph of Christ's salvific work, in which not only the heavens are sanctified by Christ, but the earth also, and the entire cosmos, is to be transformed, renewed, and glorified (*cf.* Rom. 8:22, Rev. 21:1).

In the meantime, though, Christ remains with us “even unto the end of the age,” in a hidden, mystical manner, through the Church and the Eucharist. In this life of pilgrimage, Christ strengthens us by his abiding Presence with us in the Church, as the Tent of Meeting accompanied the Israelites in the desert, and he feeds us with true Manna from heaven: his living and deified Flesh and Blood.

V

It is the Holy Spirit, hovering over his creation, who brings all this to pass. The Holy Spirit reveals to us Christ's abiding presence even after his Ascension from us. As Christ promised:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13–14)

In passing from Ascension to Pentecost, then, we move not from emptiness to fullness but rather to a deeper understanding of the fullness that was already there. That is, the Holy Spirit is sent *to reveal Christ*. On the Day of Pentecost itself, St. Peter preached about Christ and about his exaltation to the right hand of the Father (*cf.* Acts 2:33–35). The Holy Spirit reveals that Christ now reigns in glory, that he “ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25), and that he is preparing a place for us. We see the work of the Spirit very clearly during the brutal stoning of St. Stephen the Protomartyr: “Full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God’” (Acts 7:55–56).

Above all, it is the Holy Spirit who works in us the adoption of sons, crying out in our hearts, “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15). Anointed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit, we are made strong and readied for spiritual battle, as we grow “unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” (Eph. 4:13). And so it is the Holy Spirit who prepares us to be co-enthroned with Christ on the throne of God. “To him who conquers will I grant to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

Because of the Ascension, we know that Christ will reign “until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24–28).

And God shall be all in all.

A Reader's Guide to Orthodox Icons: the Descent of the Holy Spirit

iconreader.wordpress.com

The Icon for the feast of Pentecost is also called the **Descent of the Holy Spirit**, as it is a depiction of the event described in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:1-4) when the Holy Spirit descended as tongues of fire upon the Apostles gathered together and enabled them to preach in different languages. However, the Feast of Pentecost is not only the commemoration of an historical event, but a celebration of a present reality: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Likewise, the Icon for Pentecost is much more than the depiction of a past event.

The presence of the Apostle Paul in the icon, even though at that time he had not yet converted on the road to Damascus, hints that this icon is more than a purely historical picture. Sometimes, the evangelists Luke and Mark are also shown, despite also not having been present in the upper chamber at Pentecost. The gathering, then, is a representation of the Church. The Apostles are seated in a semi-circle, representing a unity and harmony similar to that found in Icons of the Holy Trinity. As in icons of the Holy Trinity, a semi-circle, rather than a full circle, is used so that we as observers are drawn into the unity.

The source of their unity is in another semi-circle at the top of the icon, showing the descent of the Holy Spirit. From the blue semi-circle (c.a. mandorlas) a single ray of light for each of those gathered shines down to illumine them. Sometimes the "tongues of fire" described in Acts are shown at the tips of the rays, ready to descend upon the Apostles. Other times, the tongues of fire are shown already within the halos of each of the seated Saints. Some icons of Pentecost show a dove, either within the mandorla at the top of the icon, or even descending upon those gathered in the upper chamber. Given the appearance of the Holy Spirit as a dove during Christ's Baptism, it is understandable that this physical image of the Spirit is also used in Pentecost icons. However, the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of flame at Pentecost, and a dove at Christ's Baptism, being – in reality – neither of these things. Therefore it is inappropriate to depict the Holy Spirit as a dove at Pentecost, or indeed in any icon except those for the Theophany feast.

At the bottom of the Icon is another semi-circle, showing an old king against a dark background. He is often named as Kosmos and represents the world. He is crowned as a symbol of earthly authority – i.e. he represents all the peoples of the world, rather than the whole of creation. He is sat "in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79), and is aged to show the corruptibility of the world. Yet he also holds a blanket containing scrolls representing Apostolic teaching (compare with the scrolls held by the Apostles in the Icon itself and "the meaning of objects held by saints in icons"). Though in darkness, the descent of the Holy Spirit has not only reached the Apostles, but also all corners of the world into which the Apostles will preach the Gospel.

The Empty Seat: A striking aspect of the Pentecost Icon is the empty space at the centre, between the Apostles Peter and Paul. This central seat is a place of honour, the "Teacher's Seat" around which the Apostles are gathered. Why is it empty? Because it is the seat Christ should be sitting in, Who has ascended physically into Heaven. Yet Jesus promised many times that though He would leave them physically, He would instead give to them the Holy Spirit as a comforter, advocate, and guide. This promise was first realized at Pentecost, and is still true today. Therefore, the Icon, which is also an Icon of the Church, shows the Apostles gathered in unity, sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, surrounding Christ Who is invisibly present. The world, Cosmos, is at their feet, ready and waiting to be harvested through the passing on of Christ's teaching.

Some icons of Pentecost show Mary the Mother of God in the centre, occupying the "Teacher's Seat". Surviving icons of this sort are usually western [from areas like Finland]. Mary was present at Pentecost, though as already mentioned, the icon is not primarily a historical snapshot of the event. The Theotokos' presence in the centre is not problematic though, as she is the ultimate exemplar of a Christian. With Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven, the Holy Spirit acts within people, and through the Saints Christ is manifested in the world. Mary is therefore shown in the "teacher's seat" as the best example we have, and the person on earth who most resembled Jesus Christ (both physically, as His mother, and spiritually as His disciple). Nevertheless, the "empty" seat is a more widespread and, I

believe, more impressive image of both Pentecost and the Church. The Apostles are seated as equals, with no individual among them taking the central seat of authority. They don't need to. Their unity as the Body of Christ is sustained through the real "Vicar of Christ": the Holy Spirit.

Deification and Sonship according to St. Athanasius of Alexandria

Fr. Matthew Baker, December 23, 2014

Popular presentations of the Orthodox Christian faith often highlight the doctrine of *theosis*, or deification, as a distinctive accent of Orthodox theology and spiritual teaching. In the 20th century, owing to the enthusiastic rediscovery of St Gregory Palamas and especially the wide influence of the theology of Vladimir Lossky, this message of deification was most often cast in terms of a "participation in the divine energies." The phrase from 2 Peter 1:4, "partakers of the divine nature [*theias koinonoi physeos*]" is also frequently cited as a biblical touchstone for the Orthodox teaching on deification.

While these accents are important, such presentations often fail to do justice to the central point. Unfortunately, the teaching regarding *theosis* is sometimes presented without robust reference to the evangelical message concerning the person of Jesus Christ and his redeeming work. Likewise, the Trinitarian shape of deification is left obscure. In fact, although certainly crucial, the doctrine of divine energies does *not* form the *central* focus of the tradition of patristic teaching on *theosis*. And only with St Cyril of Alexandria (376-444) did 2 Peter 1:4 come to the fore, owing to the importance of the category of *physis* in the Christological debates of his time - where the term *physis* in Alexandrian theology had the sense of concrete "reality" or "truth" (*aletheia*), rather than *ousia*, *essentia* or *natura*.

Not insignificantly, the most common biblical touchstone for the teaching about deification among the earliest Fathers and ecclesiastical writers - from St Justin, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus, to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and beyond - was a verse from Psalm 82: "You are all gods and sons of the Most High" (Ps. 82:6; cf Jn 10:34-36). This verse was theologically suggestive for its linking of "gods" with "sons," leading early Christian

theologians to develop the doctrine of deification in close association with the New Testament teaching concerning our adoption as sons (*huiiothesia* [lit. son-making]: Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5) and being born anew from on high as children of God (Rom. 8:16-17; Jn 1:12, 8:42 et al; 1 Jn 3:2, etc). Here the teaching on deification is fundamentally Christocentric and Trinitarian in character.

St Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) is frequently cited as witness to the doctrine of *theosis*. The neologism *theosis* [deification; being made like God], however, does not occur in his writings. It was first introduced by St Gregory the Theologian and did not become standard until Pseudo-Dionysius, in the 6th century. St Athanasius' preferred term is the verb *theopoieo* [god-making], with its corresponding noun *theopoiesis*. Athanasius' concept of deification is Christocentric, and primarily a dogmatic weapon against the Arian heresy. Excepting his Life of Anthony and his paschal letters, the ascetical aspects, so important for later tradition, do not predominate and are left largely undeveloped in Athanasius. Athanasius' anti-Arian articulation of *theopoiesis* stresses that by participating in the incarnate Son, we participate in God. This participation is closely linked to the atoning work on the Cross, to the Church, and to the Holy Spirit. Athanasius affirms Christ's divinity by highlighting the difference between the source of deification and its object: the natural sonship of the Logos is contrasted with the adoptive sonship (*huiiothesia*) given to humanity by grace. As with earlier pre-Nicene writers, deification and sonship appear as inseparably united in the theology of Athanasius.

Athanasius On the Incarnation: Deification and Atonement

Athanasius' first use of *theopoieo* occurs in his oft-quoted "formula of exchange" found in *On the Incarnation* 54.3: "He was made man in order that we might be made gods." Athanasius stresses here the gifts of the knowledge of God, the undoing of pagan idolatry and ignorance, and freedom from death as the fruits of this exchange. Christ "manifested himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of men that we might inherit immortality" (De Inc. 54.3).

In the context of *On the Incarnation*, Christ's taking of a "body" refers not simply to his human conception in time, but to his suffering the Cross and

death. Christ's body shared the same nature with all of fallen humanity (8.2; 20.2) and was thus *mortal*: it "could not but die, inasmuch as it was mortal, and to be offered unto death on behalf of all: for which purpose the Savior fashioned it for Himself" (31.4). Yet "by virtue of the union of the Word with it," this body was also raised from the dead, "placed out of the reach of corruption," and rendered immortal (20.1-5).

Christ's death and resurrection have immediate, intrinsic consequences for all mankind. Christ died as a "substitute" (37.7) "in the stead of all," (9.1; 10.1-2; 20.2), accomplishing not only his own death, but "the death of men" (22.3). Christ healed and restored human nature of its corruptibility not by external means, but from within (44.1-8), by paying the debt of death exacted by the Law (6.2-3; 9.5; 20.5), becoming "a curse" (25.2) while yet being sinless. In this way he put an end to the Law (10.5) and, having risen again, became an "ambassador for all with the Father" (7.5).

While some presentations often wrongly and polemically oppose deification to atonement, for Athanasius deification is closely allied to Christ's atoning work, understood in clearly substitutionary terms. In the famous formula of deification drawn from the conclusion of *On the Incarnation* (54.3) – all too often quoted as a slogan, with little regard for context – we are to understand the Son's whole redemptive assumption of the concrete historical situation of sinful man under the Law and death, as climaxing in the Cross. Moreover, there is a distinctly *ecclesiological* dimension here. Having suffered death in a manner which – unlike the deaths of Isaiah and John the Baptist – kept "his body undivided and in perfect soundness," so that "no pretext be afforded that would divide the Church" (24.4), Jesus now takes up his abode "in one body among his peers" (9.4; cf. 9.2-4). Deification, according to Athanasius, is the fruit of Christ's atoning work, and takes form in the Church.

If in *De Incarnatione* the goal and purpose of the incarnation is identified with deification (*theopoesis*), in his later works Athanasius more frequently links it specifically with adoptive sonship (*huiiothesia*). Athanasius' earliest exposition of this doctrine of adoptive sonship appears to be in his *De Decretis* (chapters 3 and 7), written sometime between 346 and 356 in defense of the Nicene definition. Unlike

the oft-quoted exchange formula of *De Incarnatione* 54.3, Athanasius' later formulations have an explicitly Trinitarian character:

On this account has the Word become flesh, that, since the word is Son, therefore, because of the Son dwelling in us, He may be called our Father also; for 'He sent forth,' says Scripture, 'the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father.' Therefore the Son in us, calling upon His own Father, causes Him to be named our Father also (*Contra Arianos* IV, 15.22).

In his letter to the Egyptian bishops in 356, Athanasius will count *huiiothesia* as amongst the four "instructions and gifts of grace" given us by Christ, together with prayer, power against demons, and "that exceeding great and singular grace," "knowledge of the Father and the Word Himself, and the gift of the Holy Ghost" (*Ad Episcopos Aegypti*, I.1). According to Athanasius, the Spirit of adoption and of freedom gives the Christian fearlessness to confess the truth.

The divine sonship of believers is an *adoptive* one, which could not subsist apart from the incarnation of the only-begotten Son. This is a truth to which the Arians have been blinded: "Thus hearing that men are called sons, they thought themselves equal to the True Son by nature" (*Contra Arianos* III: 25.17). In the face of this confusion, beginning with his work *De Decretis*, Athanasius strictly distinguishes between *natural* and *adoptive* sonship: only Christ is Son of God by nature, being *homoousios* with the Father, whereas we are sons by grace, through the indwelling of the Word.

It is this sonship by grace for which man was created; but being an adoptive sonship and not a natural one, its attendant inheritance can be lost through rebellion: "Since they were not sons by nature, when they altered, the Spirit was taken away and they were disinherited; and again at their repentance that God who thus at the beginning gave them grace, will receive them, and give light, and call them sons again" (*Contra Arianos* I, 11:33). There is thus a distinct *moral* dimension to adoptive filiation in Christ, attaching "to each according to the practice of virtue," "on the ground of observance of the commandments" (*De Decretis*, III.10; V.20), which is an imitation of Christ in his relation to the Father (*Contra Arianos* I, 25.19-22). Nevertheless, sonship remains a *gift* which cannot be attained by moral effort alone,

but only through baptism into the Trinity, in which the believer is taken up into the relationship between the Father and the Son: “for with such an initiation we too are made sons verily, and using the name of Father, we acknowledge from that name the Word in the Father” (*De Decretis*, 5.31).

For Athanasius, *theopoiesis* [being made god] and *huiiothesia* [being made a son] are two closely related tropes indicating the same salvific reality:

Adoption therefore could not be apart from the real Son, who says, ‘No one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.’ And how can there be deifying apart from the Word and before Him? Yet, He saith to their brethren the Jews, ‘If He called them gods, unto whom the Word came.’ And if all that are called sons and gods, whether in earth or in heaven, were adopted and deified through the Word, and the Son Himself is the Word, it is plain through Him are they all. And He Himself before all, or rather He Himself only is very Son (*Contra Arianos I*, 11.39)

Athanasius shows a noted preference for the language of Scripture: “the tokens of truth are more exact as drawn from Scripture, than from other sources” (*De Decretis*, 5.32). Yet if the language of adoption bears with it a more explicit reference to the biblical text and possibly a more personal character, the language of “deification” has a unique strength in clarifying the authentic teaching of Scripture in the context of the Arian controversy, in that it underscores the divinity of the Son as of one essence (*homoousios*) with the Father, and thus the reality of our participation in the life of God through the Son. Only if the Son is of one being with and “proper to” (*idion*) the Father are we able to be deified by partaking of the Son.

This deification is equally inseparable from the Son’s “in-homination” (*enanthropoiesis*) and assumption of the human “body.” According to Athanasius, Christ is the “Way” and our “High Priest” on account of his having assumed humanity (*Expositio Fidei*, 4). Unlike the Arians and semi-Arians who saw the Logos as *inherently* and eternally priest and mediator (and therefore subordinate to God), for Athanasius as for the Apostle Paul, it is “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) who “ministers the things of God to us, and the things of ours to God” (*Contra Arianos*, IV.6). In the indivisible unity of his

incarnate dispensation is to be found both God’s Word to us and our perfect and vicarious response to God.

It is Christ’s sharing in our humanity that is the “root” of our reception of the fullness of his divinity: “Just as the branches are of the one essence with the vine, and are from it, so we also having our bodies homogenous with the Lord’s body, receive of His fullness (Jn. 1:16) and have that body as our root for resurrection and our salvation” (*De Sententia Dionysii*, 10). Adoption as sons thus depends on relationship to Christ’s *body*: “Because of our relationship to his body we too have become God’s temple, and in consequence are made God’s sons, so that even in us the Lord is now worshipped, and beholders report, as the Apostle says, that God is in them of a truth. As also John says in the Gospel, ‘As many as received him, to them gave he power to become children of God’” (*Epistle* 61). Athanasius employs the term “body” (*soma*) in a three-fold sense, referring at once to the body on the Cross, the Eucharist, and the Church. These together form the created medium of our deification:

It is plain that the Word has come to be in us, for He has put on our body. ‘And Thou Father in Me;’ for I am Thy Word, and since thou art in Me, because I am Thy Word, and I in them because of the body, and because of Thee the salvation of men is perfected in Me, therefore I ask that they also may become one, according to the body that is in Me and according to its perfection; that they too become perfect, having oneness with It, and having become one in It; that, as if all were carried by Me, all may be one body and one spirit, and may grow up unto a perfect man. For we all, partaking of the Same, become one body, having the one Lord in ourselves (*Contra Arianos III*, 25.22).

For Athanasius, then, deification is a reality thoroughly and inseparably Christocentric, eucharistic, and ecclesial. It is the reality of sonship, effected in the Eucharist within the one body of the Church, by which we have access to the Father through the one High Priest and Mediator Jesus Christ.

Indwelling through the Spirit of Sonship

Athanasius’ account of deification (*theopoiesis*) and adoptive sonship (*huiiothesia*) is not limited only to the work of Christ, but also accords a central place to the Holy Spirit. It is not only because it is united

to the Word that Christ's humanity is a deified one, and thus the "root" of our deification, but also because it is a *humanity anointed with the Holy Spirit*. According to Athanasius, Christ "at once gives and receives [the Spirit], giving as God's Word, receiving as man" (*Contra Arianos* I:12.48). He acts as our vicarious representative not only in his death on the Cross and Resurrection, but throughout the whole of his earthly life – not least, in his baptism, when he received the Spirit for us: "When the Lord, as man, was washed in Jordan, it was we who were washed in Him and by Him. And when He received the Spirit, we it was who by Him were made recipients of it" (*Contra Arianos* I: 11.43).

Only as united to the grace-filled humanity of Jesus do we receive the Spirit of God in an abiding way. But likewise, reciprocally, it is only through the Spirit of sonship abiding in us through baptism that we come to partake of the Son, and abiding in the Son, come to share in the life of the Father. For Athanasius, to be "in the Spirit" is to be "in the Son," and to be "in the Son" is to be "in God" as an adopted son of the Father. "It is the Spirit then which is in God, and not we viewed in our own selves; and as we are sons and gods because of the Word in us, so shall we be accounted to have become one in the Son and in the Father, because that Spirit is in us, which is in the Word which is in the Father" (*Contra Arianos* III: 25. 25). The reality of our deification as adopted sons and children of God is grounded in the Spirit's dwelling in the Son, as the Son dwells also in the Father. Deification thus depends on the consubstantiality (*homoousios*) of the Son with the Father, as defined by the Council of Nicaea, and likewise the consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Son.

This doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Spirit and the co-inherence of the persons of the Trinity is further explicated by Athanasius with incredible depth and power in his letters *To Serapion*. In these epistles, written around AD 357 during his third exile, Athanasius establishes the theme of deification as a reception the Spirit of *huiiothesia* (Rom. 8:15) on the firm foundation of a robust Trinitarian theology, informed by a profound sense of what later theology would call the *perichoresis* [reciprocal existence/mutual interpenetration] of the divine persons. According to Athanasius, the Son is the single *eikon* [icon] of the whole Godhead, whose image the Spirit communicates in making us sons

"conformed to the image of the Son" (Rom. 8:29). He writes:

While Christ is the true Son, we are made into sons when we receive the Spirit: "For you have not received," it says, "the Spirit of slavery that leads back to fear. But you have received the Spirit of sonship" (Rom. 8:15). But when we are made sons by the Spirit, it is clearly in Christ that we receive the title "children of God": "For to those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God" (Jn. 1:12)... And when the Spirit is given to us (for the Savior said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22)), it is God who is in us... Such being the correlation (*sus-toichia*) and the unity of the Holy Trinity, who would dare to separate the Son from the Father, or the Spirit from the Son or from the Father himself? (*Ad Serapion* I, 19).

Because of the co-inherence of the persons of the Trinity, when one person of the Godhead dwells in us, the entire Trinity is likewise present: "When the Spirit is in us, the Word who gives the Spirit is also in us, and the Father is in the Word" (*Ad Serapion* I, 30).

There is a distinct order to this co-inherence amongst the persons of the Trinity. According to Athanasius, while the Spirit "proceeds" or takes his existence from the Father, he "shines forth" from the Word, and "receives" from the Son, as the Son himself receives from the Father. "The Spirit is said to have the same relation of nature and *taxis* [order/arrangement] to the Son as the Son has to the Father," writes Athanasius. "He is 'proper' (*idion*) to the Son and belongs to His being, just as the Son is proper to Father and belongs to the Father's being." Likewise, in the mission of the Trinity to the world, this order of being amongst the persons is maintained: the Spirit is sent in the name of the Son, who himself has come in the name of the Father. Thus, "the Spirit is called the Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:15). And again, while the Son is Wisdom (1 Cor 1:24) and Truth (cf. Jn. 14:6), it is written that the Spirit is the Spirit of Wisdom (cf. Is. 11:2) and Truth (cf. Jn. 14:17, 15:26)" (*Ad Serapion* I, 25).

In keeping with this order, a two-way movement can be traced within the salvific economy. On the one hand, "Everything that belongs to the Father belongs to the Son; thus, what is given by the Son in the Spirit are the Father's gifts" – gifts Athanasius identifies with the common energy of the Holy

Trinity. Conversely, “it is in the Spirit that the Word glorifies creation and presents it to the Father by divinizing it and granting it adoption” (*Ad Serapion* I, 26). *Huiiothesia* and *theopoiesis* are closely linked, essentially identical, and structured in a Trinitarian way. More uniquely, in *Ad Serapion*, the Spirit’s communication of the Son and his saving activity in creation are dependent on the Spirit’s own eternal “in-dwelling” of the person of the Son.

Conclusion

Athanasius’ identification of deification with adoptive sonship follows the earliest patristic tradition and is continued in later Fathers, such as St Cyril of Alexandria (e.g. *Dial. Trin.* 5 and 7; *In Jo.* 1.9, 4.1, 5.5) and St Maximus the Confessor (*Ad Thal.* 6 and 63; *Or. Dom.* 1; *Amb.* 42). It is likewise integral to the theology of St Augustine of Hippo (e.g., *Sermo* 192.1; *en Ps.* 49.1.2; *en Ps.* 146.5.11), who closely resembles St Athanasius in this regard.

This patristic teaching concerning *theosis* is essentially evangelical theology, a facet of the apostolic and biblical message concerning the person of Jesus Christ and his saving work. There is no false mystification or obscurantism here, no esotericism, and no spiritual elitism whatsoever. Deification, according to the Orthodox teaching, is no more and no less than the adoptive sonship proclaimed by the Apostle Paul: our acceptance and recognition by the Father as his sons by grace, in and through our incorporation into his only-begotten Son by nature, Jesus Christ, in his body, the Church, by way of the Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:15) – the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:9).

This is a work of God effected in and by Jesus Christ through his incarnation and atoning work, received in baptism, continued through a life lived in conformity with Christ and his commandments, and consummated in the Eucharist – the prayer of sonship, wherein we are enabled to call upon God as “our Father,” thus becoming “gods” through worthy eucharistic communion (Maximus, *Myst.* 20). Finally, this deification and sonship will be revealed in fullness at the glorious future resurrection unto life, “the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19).

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

On Being Made Sons

from the episode ‘Sons of God, Equal to the Angels’ of the Lord of Spirits Podcast by Frs. Andrew Stephen Damick & Stephen De Young, October 23, 2020

Fr. Stephen: We can see how central [*huiiothesia*; being made a son] is to St. Paul’s thinking. Every time he talks about salvation, [such as] in Romans 8:14-17:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry: Abba, Father! The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

You may have noticed, it switches from “sons” to “children” there. That’s because the Greek switches from “sons” to “children” there.

Both the phrase “sons of God” and “children of God” occur in the Scriptures in the Greek. Unfortunately, because we want to be gender sensitive, a lot of modern translations translate both as “children of God,” so you can’t tell which the original says when you read in English. But “sons of God” of course has this important weight that we’ve been talking about, of referring to the angelic beings, whereas “children of God” refers to other elements of that.

But we have this element of adoption here. It’s connected to being heirs again of the promises, fellow-heirs with Christ, and also with, of course, glorification, another element of *theosis*: coming to share in Christ’s glory, the glory of the resurrected and reigning.

Fr. Andrew: This is continuing in Romans 8 ... starting with verse 19 and going through 23:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth

until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly, as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So this connects us again to this idea that creation itself is participating in this, which, if we understand that these sons of God, these angelic beings, are governing creation and participating in the governing of creation, and that our job is to do the same thing, and if we're in Christ, we begin to do that, then it makes sense that the creation would be bound up in human destiny. Creation can't be what it's supposed to be, in a sense, without our participation as sons of God.

Fr. Stephen: Right, and this isn't humanity over against creation. The whole purpose of creation for St. Paul, the reason God created everything he created including us, was so that he could share his divine and eternal life with us humans, to bring forth the sons of God. That's the purpose of everything and of all this. And this takes place at the redemption of our bodies, notice, our physicality. So this is not redemption *from* our bodies, *from* the world, but it's *in* and *with* the world. So theosis has nothing to do with Gnosticism; this is the opposite of Gnosticism.

And also notice that language that St. Paul uses fairly frequently, of the first-fruits of the Spirit.

[**From above; Fr. Stephen:** When God gave promises and gave prophecies, all through the Old Testament—and even there are examples in the New Testament—there was a sign attached to that prophecy: there was some immediate fulfillment. There was something that happened immediately in the short term that they could see, and that served as the guarantee that the greater prophesy was going to come true.

Fr. Andrew: Kind of a down payment, so to speak.

Fr. Stephen: Right.] Talking about a sign and a deposit, we have received the Spirit, which is the sign of the truth of the promise of the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection. It's the sign and the beginning point.

Then, just real quickly, Romans 8:29, to pile one more on. This gets quoted a lot, especially by our Calvinist friends, because it talks about

predestination, but let's just for a second don't get triggered by the word "predestined," and listen to the rest of the verse:

That for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

The word there that's translated "predestined" really means to set in order in advance. So following off of what we just read about creation, God created all these things and put them in place and set them all in order for the purpose that we would be conformed to the image of Christ, we would become like Christ—another element of theosis: become like God—so that Christ would be the firstborn—he is the only-begotten Son, the unique Son—and then we become the sons of God through him.

Fr. Andrew: Right. Adoption in Christ.

The Doctrine of Christ:

A Layman's Handbook

by Abp. Dmitri (Royster) of Dallas, 1984

Orthodox Philosopher Teena Blackburn reminds us that *Christian teachings, especially Christian sexual teachings, will not make any sense if you don't know Christ first, and if you don't understand what the Faith says about anthropology: about who Jesus is, what a human is, what life is all about. All that has to come first, or you just get a long list of rules. Christians are following Someone; the pattern of our life is not arbitrary! It is, ideally, rooted in the idea (and experience) that nothing God asks of us is for anything but our good, our joy, our ultimate happiness* (adapted by the editor). In order to help us come to know who Christ is and what the Church teaches us about Christ's divinity and his humanity (a pattern for our humanity!), each month of 2021 we will be looking at a chapter of "The Doctrine of Christ" by the ever-memorable Abp. Dmitri of Dallas (+2011), renowned Orthodox biblical scholar, theologian, missionary, and pastor.

Chapter 6:

WHAT THIS UNION MEANS TO US

There are several consequences, results, or implications of this union of the two natures in Christ that are directly related to the question of our

redemption. The first may be called the **communion of attributes**. The theologians use the Latin technical term '**communicatio idiomatum**' to describe this consequence. It consists of the fact that in the Person of Christ, the two natures united without confusion, without change, without division and without separation, each of the natures transmitting its attributes to the other. In other terms, what belongs and is proper to Him as Man is attributed to Him as God. What is proper to Him as God is ascribed to Him as Man.

This principle is illustrated by such New Testament passages as "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," (Rm. 5:10); "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all," (Rm. 8:32); "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins..." (I Pt. 3:18); "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second Man is the Lord from heaven," (I Cor. 15:47); "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven," (Jn. 3:13). God is by nature immortal and beyond suffering. Man is of this creation and does not "come down" from heaven. Yet here we see the attributes of one nature attributed to the other.

We hear this doctrine over and over again in the liturgy of the Church. For example, in the Canon to the Cross, Tone 1, for Friday Matins, we hear: "For as thou, who by nature art impassible [not subject to suffering], hast endured to suffer, and thou hast been crucified with the thief, O Word, who hast put to death the arch-evil enemy, and hast saved those who sing thy praises."

St. John of Damascus wrote an **Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith**, a summary of the paramount doctrines of the Church, with quotations from the major Fathers who lived and wrote before his time. (St. John lived from A.D. 675 to about the middle of the next century.) The following paragraph dealing with this communion of attributes comes from his very important work:

With regard to Christ's Person (**hypostasis**), we call Him by a name taken from the two natures or from only one of them. In both cases, we apply to Him the qualities of the two natures. Christ is called **Son of God** and **God**, and, at the same time, He takes the attributes or qualities of that nature which He united to His Divinity, that is, **of the flesh**.

Thus it is said of Him: "God having suffered," or "the Lord of glory crucified," not insofar as He is God, but insofar as He is God and Man. In a parallel way, while He is called Man and **Son of Man**, He takes the attributes and the glory that belong to the divine nature. Thus He is called "Child before the ages," and "man without beginning;" not because He is child and man, but because, being God, He made Himself a child subsequently. Such is the **reciprocal communication** of the attributes, by which each of the natures transmits its own to the other, by reason of the identity of the Person (**hypostasis**) and the **reciprocal penetration** of the two natures. That is why we can say of Jesus Christ: "He is our God; He has been seen on earth and has conversed with men." (*Barnabas* 3:26-28)

The two natures reside in Christ **entire** and **distinct**, without confusion, and retain their own attributes, without change. The expressions that are used to describe the redemptive work of the Word of God are applied to the one Person of Jesus Christ: without division and without separation.

Thus, as we have already seen, it is for the very reason of the union of the two natures in Christ that the Church has always insisted that the title "Theotokos" or "Mother of God" is not only appropriately applied to the Virgin Mary but that the very title preserves and confirms the doctrine of the union.

The Deification of the Human Nature of Christ

On speaking of the Incarnation of the Son of God, we have said that He identified Himself completely with the human race, in everything, of course except man's sin. (Hb. 4:15) However, He did accept the consequence of sin which was death.

Death had entered into the world as a result of sin, and that by **one man**, Adam. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." (Rm. 5:12) So unified is the human race that not only the consequence of man's sin, but also the very inclination to sin became the heritage of all men. In the same way, the sinlessness, righteousness, and obedience of one (of the same race) brought to mankind liberation from the reign of

death. Thereby was made possible man's salvation: union with God.

"For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rm. 5:17-19)

Man was made in the image of God and given the capacity for growing toward the realization of that image. He was in a process of deification, with the goal of full participation in God's goodness. Yet he misused his gifts, interrupting the process. He soiled the image and corrupted his nature. He was in need of reconciliation. Thus, Christ's taking our nature and raising it to its highest possible level of perfection, deifying it, is the basis of man's deification. He is set back on the right road: his union with God, or his salvation.

St. Athanasius says that "the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death hath lost its power over all." (*On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, § 9)

St. Gregory of Nyssa states: "For through purity He brought into the closest kinship with the Father of our nature that 'new man which is created after the likeness of God' (Eph. 4:24), in whom 'the whole fullness of the Godhead dwelt in bodily form' (Col. 2:9). And **along with Himself He drew to the same state of grace all the nature which shares in His human body**, and is akin to Him ... For what happened in the human nature of Christ is **a benefit shared by all men who believe...**" (*Against Eunomius*, 12,1)

As a consequence of the union of the two natures in Christ, the human nature is deified: rendered god-like, made divine. By this it is not meant that the humanity of Christ changed into divinity, that it ceased to be limited or that it received the divine attributes in exchange for the human attributes. Rather, the human nature, assumed by the Son of God in the unity of His person, participated in the divinity, the original goal of man's creation. It was elevated in its perfections to the highest possible degree in humanity, without ceasing nevertheless to be human.

St. John of Damascus summarizes this dogma in this way:

... [The] flesh of our Lord was deified; became one with God and God, not by change or transformation or confusion of nature. "One of the natures," says Gregory the Theologian, "deified, and the other was deified, and, if I should dare to say, became one with God; He that anointed became man, and He that was anointed became God. And that, not by a change of nature, but by a providential or hypostatic union for the purpose of [man's] salvation, by which union the flesh was united inseparably with God the Word, and by a reciprocal contact of natures, in which we can see some analogy in iron reddened by fire ... Since the Word, in becoming flesh, did not shed its divinity and did not rid itself of the divine perfections that are proper to it, so the flesh, having been deified, did not change its nature or its natural attributes; for even after the union, since the two natures remained unconfused, so also their attributes remained unjoined. The flesh of the Lord "enriched itself with divine forces" by its intimate union with the Word, "without having lost any of its natural attributes;" for the flesh accomplished the divine acts not by the power that is in it, but by the power of the Word united with it, the Word manifesting His own works through flesh. Thus iron reddened by fire burns, not because it has received from nature the power to burn, but because it borrows it from its union with fire. This is why the flesh was mortal by itself, but life-creating by its hypostatic union with the Word ..." (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 17)

The name "Christ" means the "anointed one." The Lord Jesus Christ was anointed for His mission to raise up fallen mankind. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the words of the Prophet Isaiah (61:1) are thus applied to Christ: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." (Hb. 1:9) By "thy fellows" is meant the fellow human beings of the Son of Man,

since He took part in the same flesh and blood of the children that God had given Him. (Hb. 2:13,14)

The flesh of the Lord was exalted and became immortal and incorrupt. David "seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted ..." (Peter's Sermon, Acts 2:31-33) "Wherefore God hath also highly exalted Him, and given Him a name, which is above every name." (Ph. 2:9)

It is evident that the Apostle's meaning is that Christ's humanity was exalted, since His divinity had no need of exaltation, perfection or anything else. "Even by this phrase the mystery of godliness is declared, for he who says 'exalted by the right hand of God' clearly reveals the unspeakable dispensation of this mystery, that the right hand of God, that made all things that are (which is the Lord, by whom all things were made, and without Him was nothing made that was made, [Jn. 1:3]), Itself raised to its own height the Man united with it, making Him also to be what It is by nature." (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, V, 3)

The eternal **divine** knowledge was transmitted to the man Jesus, who grew also in human knowledge, as one of our race. (Lk. 2:52) "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth ..." (Jn. 5:20) And yet the human knowledge of Jesus was not changed into omniscience or infinite wisdom. He still asked, on hearing that His friend Lazarus was dead, "Where have ye laid him?" (Jn. 11:34) He likewise declared that He did not know the time of the Second Coming: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mk. 13:22) Obviously, as the eternal Word of God and One of the Holy Trinity, He knows all things.

The holiness and perfection of the divinity were communicated to the Son of Man as well. Even at His conception, the angel referred to Him as **holy**. (Lk. 1:35) He was sanctified, according to His own words: "Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (Jn. 10:36) As the eternal Son of God, He had no need of sanctification, but received it in the flesh "so that through

Him it might pass to all men," (St. Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, I, 47)

The same thing may be said of the power that was given to Him. When the Jews sought to kill Him because "He made Himself equal with God," He answered them: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." (Jn. 5: 18,19) The Son of God is all-powerful, but the human being seen by men was the instrument of His omnipotence.

The New Testament, as we have seen from the passages quoted above, demonstrates that the One Person Jesus Christ accomplished His work of redemption as God and Man. His humanity, deified by its intimate union with His divinity, remains humanity, and it thus provides the means for our own deification. We have been made partakers of Christ's suffering (I Pt. 4:13), and therefore we will be partakers of His glory when it shall be revealed (I Pt. 4:13; 5:1) Our goal and destiny is to be partakers of the divine nature. (II Pt. 1:4)

We Worship Christ as One Person

The Holy Gospel according to St. John records these words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father; He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father, which hath sent Him." (5:22,23)

St. Paul says concerning Jesus: "God which hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." (Ph. 2:9,10) And in another place, he says: "And again, when He bringeth in the first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him." (Hb. 1:6)

In St. John's Revelation, where he records his vision of worship in heaven, we read: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every

creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." (5:11-13)

The above passages from the New Testament show very clearly that it is proper and essential to adore or worship Jesus Christ as one and the same Person, as God-Man, **for the very reason that the divinity and the humanity are united in Him inseparably.**

Although His humanity remains humanity, having been taken by Him into the unity of His divine Person, it is the humanity of God the Word. Not only is this doctrine clear from the words of Christ Himself, from the testimony of the Apostles, and from the vision of heavenly worship in the Revelation, but the Fathers of the Church in all generations have taught it.

St. Athanasius wrote: "Although in itself a part of creation, the flesh (of Christ) became the flesh of God; and we, in adoring that flesh, do not separate it from the Word, as in adoring the Word, we do not separate Him from the flesh." (*Against Arius*, I, n.43)

This was taught by St. John Chrysostom as follows: "It is truly great and astonishing that our flesh was taken up into heaven and there receives the adoration of the Angels, the Archangels, of the Seraphim and the Cherubim." (*On the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Homily V)

It is because of this consideration that the Church insisted in the Council that condemned Nestorius that the title of **Theotokos** (the one who gave birth to God, or the Mother of God) was not only correctly given to the Virgin Mary, but also that the very title was a guarantee of the unity of Christ.

Again, St. John of Damascus wrote: "Christ therefore, is one, perfect God and perfect Man; and Him we worship along with the Father and the Spirit, with one obeisance, adoring even His immaculate flesh and not considering that the flesh is unworthy of adoration: for in fact, it is worshipped in the one Person (**hypostasis**) of the Word, which indeed became hypostasis for it. But in this we do not do homage to that which is created. For we worship Him, not as mere flesh, but as flesh united with divinity, and because His two natures are brought under the one Person and One Hypostasis of God the Word. I fear to touch coal because of the fire bound

up with the wood. I worship the two-fold nature of Christ because of the divinity that in Him is bound up with flesh." (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III,8)

And St. Cyril of Alexandria wrote thus: "We are accustomed to worship Emmanuel with one single worship, not separating from the Word the body which was personally (in hypostasis) united to Him." (*Against Nestorius*, 2,10)

This dogma concerning the "one single and inseparable divine worship due to Jesus Christ as one and the same Person, as God-Man," and always taught by the Church, was given formal expression at the Council of Ephesus, the Third Ecumenical Council (A.D. 431). There the Holy Fathers accepted and approved the "Anathemas" of St. Cyril of Alexandria against Nestorius.

To the Orthodox, and to all those who agree with all that has been said about the union of the two natures in Christ, the doctrine under discussion should be an obvious consequence of the Incarnation. Yet, the fact is that there exists now in some Christian groups, as there did in other times, a tendency to find it perfectly proper to worship the divinity of Christ and merely to have reverence for His humanity, as some different Person.

St. Cyril saw the disastrous possibility of such a differentiation between the divinity and humanity of Christ. Thus he pointed to the similarity between this novel doctrine and the denial of the title Theotokos to the holy Virgin Mary. In either case, the result would be to separate Christ into two persons.

The Two Wills and the Two Energies

The heresy which denied the Incarnation, or minimized it, had disturbed the peace of the Church from the earliest times and manifested itself in various forms, as we have already seen. The victory for the Biblical doctrine of the fulness of Christ's divinity and His humanity was won at the Council Chalcedon (A.D. 451), its definition of the two natures and their union standing as a basic article of faith.

Next is seen the error of denying Christ's human nature in the so-called **monothelite** heresy. The name was derived from the Greek words **monos**, one, and **theliton**, will. It was applied to those who said they accepted the teaching of the two natures, but then actually rejected it by saying that both the human will and the human energy (operation and

acts) were absorbed by the divine will and energy. Therefore, it followed that in Christ there was but one will and one energy: the divine.

Some historians have seen in this idea an attempt at appeasing the Monophysites, a kind of compromise that might restore the already damaged ecclesiastical unity of the Empire, thereby securing its political unity. It was supported by some emperors and high-ranking clergymen, who felt that the formula could be accepted by those who had accepted Chalcedon's definition and by those who had rejected it.

On the other hand, the defenders of the Orthodox doctrine, principally St. Maximus the Confessor, saw in it the rejection of the Incarnation, the assumption of human nature by the Son of God. Maximus argued that without a human will and energy, authentic humanity would be inconceivable. Thus he asserted that the two natural wills of Christ are not contrary to each other, but that the human will follows the divine. This conformity is not an abolition of the human nature, but its restoration. Man was created in the first place to seek to do God's will.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III, A.D. 680-681) condemned monothelitism in these terms: "We confess likewise in Christ, in accordance with the doctrine of the holy Fathers, two natural wills or desires and two natural energies [operations or acts], without change, without confusion; two natural wills [wills corresponding to each nature], not contrary wills, whatever impious heretics may have said: His human will obeys and submits itself without opposition or struggles to His all-powerful divine will." (Acts of the Council)

Let us now examine the evidence of Holy Scripture in this regard. The Saviour said of Himself: "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me." (Jn. 6:38) In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt," (Mt. 26:39); and, "not my will, but thine, be done," (Lk. 22:42). By distinguishing in these two cases His will from the Father's and by subjecting the first to the second, Jesus obviously indicated His human will, because His divine will was not different from the will of the Father but identical.

Before His saving sufferings, He said: "Let this cup pass from me," but, of course, He was to drink

of that cup as a man, and not as God. Therefore, as man He wanted to avoid the suffering; it was the expression of a natural fear. " 'Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done:' 'Not mine,' that is to say, my will and thy will, inasmuch as I am of the same essence as thou." (St. John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 18)

St. Athanasius, interpreting the Lord's words in Matthew 26:39, wrote: "Here the Lord manifests two wills: the human will proper to the flesh, and the divine will, proper to God. The first, in accordance with the weakness of the flesh, prays to avoid suffering; but the second accepts." (*On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, § 21)

The holy Apostle Paul says: "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," (Ph. 2:8); and further, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him." (Hb. 5:8, 9) Humbling Himself and becoming obedient must both be attributed to His human will, as St. Maximus the Confessor states in his *Dialogue with Pyrrhus*.

That the Lord Jesus Christ manifested the will proper to His human nature throughout His earthly life is seen in the following: "They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, **He would not drink.**" (Mt. 27:34) "And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it ..." (Mk.7:24) "The day following Jesus **would go forth** into Galilee ..." (Jn. 1:43) "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for He would **not walk** in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill Him." (Jn. 7:1)

In Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, we find an expression of His divine will, a will for His people that He had even before His Incarnation: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often **would I have gathered** thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, but ye would not!" (Lk. 13:34)

With regard to the energies, it is clear that what belongs to Christ's divinity is His divine and all-powerful energy, with which He performed miracles. What belongs to His humanity is His human energy: eating, drinking, being thirsty, walking, etc.

In the healing of Jairus' daughter, "He took the damsel by the hand, and said to her ... Damsel, I say unto thee, arise ..." (Mt. 5:41,42) He took her by the hand and spoke to her. This is the human act or energy. He restored her to life. This is the divine act.

"The miracles were performed by the Divinity, but not without the flesh, and the lesser things were performed by the flesh, but not separated from the Divinity, which did not suffer, but rendered the sufferings salutary ..." (St. John of Damascus, *Op. cit.*, III,19)

The Chalcedonian formula concerning the way in which the two natures were united in Christ: without confusion or change, without division or separation, applies also, of course, to the two wills and the two energies. Hence, it is proper to speak of Christ's **theandric** energy (**theos** - God; **andros** - man). When He became incarnate, His human energy was deified and not without participation in His divine energy; His divine energy was not without participation in His human energy. Either was accomplished with the cooperation of the other. (St. John of Damascus, *Ibid.*)

It cannot go without stating that the monothelite heresy gives us an example of an early attempt at "ecumenical" compromise. Byzantine politicians of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries were more concerned about the unity of the Empire than about Christian truth. To them it probably made little difference whether in Christ there was one nature or two.

The fact is that the Fourth Council had made its definition but it was one not accepted by the Monophysites of Asia and Africa. Certainly, the provinces where they lived now had one more reason to be at odds with Constantinople.

To the powerful forces that were willing to compromise for political expedience, people like St. Maximus the Confessor, who defended Orthodoxy against compromise, were a threat. He was severely persecuted and mutilated.

Yet, monothelism could not have healed the breach. Three parties would have resulted had the politicians been able to force it on the Church for a time. It died and was absorbed by its parent heresy. Nevertheless, what did survive was a certain spirit, not unlike the "ecumenical" spirit of the Twentieth Century, in which all doctrine can be restudied, tampered with or bartered off.

If there are any topics you would like covered in future editions of the Prophet, or if you have any articles which you found to be a blessing, please let Fr. John know!