

May 6, 2002
Pascha

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The story of the two disciples walking to Emmaus on the afternoon of the day of the Lord's Resurrection (Luke 24:13-35) is of great importance to biblical exegesis and the structure of Christian worship.

First, with respect to biblical exegesis, it may be said that the conversation of the risen Christ, as He walked with Cleopas and his unnamed companion and interpreted the Holy Scriptures for them, was the Church's first formal course in the proper Christian interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. From time to time, as we know, Jesus had interpreted individual passages of Moses, Isaiah, David, and other Old Testament writers, normally in reference to Himself. In that discourse on the road to Emmaus, however, Jesus devoted the entire effort and time to this theme, laying the foundation for the proper Christian understanding of the Bible. It may be said that all correct Christian exegesis goes back to that conversation, and we are surely correct in going to the writers of the New Testament as illustrating the interpretive patterns put forward in that conversation.

The "allegory" (Galatians 4:24) or "spiritual sense" (1:Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Corinthians 3:18) of God's holy Word is that Word's underlying Christological reference, its relationship to the incarnate Lord who brings it to historical and theological fulfillment. Clothed in the literary forms of history, parable, and poetry, the Bible's deeper doctrinal message is ever its reference to the Mystery of Christ, who is at once God's only path to us and our only path to God. Thus, every line of the Bible, every symbol and every story, every prophecy, proverb, and prayer bears its deeper significance in Christ, its meaning conveyed in the catechesis of the Church and sacramental sharing in the Christian Sacraments. It is this more profound Christological "sense" of Holy Scripture that separates the Christian from the Jew.

We may also say, in this respect, that all of Christian doctrine is rooted in our Lord's Paschal discourse to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. The timing of that discourse is likewise significant, for it took place on the very day of His rising from the dead; on that day "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David," demonstrated that He "was worthy

to take the scroll and to open its seals." He was worthy to do this, because He was slain and had redeemed us to God by His blood (Revelation 5:5,6). Jesus interprets Holy Scripture - indeed, He is the very interpretation of Holy Scripture - because He "fulfills" Holy Scripture by the historical and theological events of His death and Resurrection. His Blood-redemption of the world is the formal principle of biblical interpretation.

Second, in the Paschal experience of those two disciples we have the initial paradigm of proper Sunday worship as the Apostles handed it down to us. The experience of those men, hearing and understanding God's Word while their hearts burned within them, led to their recognition of Him in the breaking of the Bread. Holy Church has always understood this intricate combination of Word and Sacrament to indicate the structure of correct Sunday worship. This is the format we find in the New Testament (Acts 20:7-11) and in the earliest explicit description of Christian Sunday worship left us from the second century (St. Justin Martyr, First Apology 67).

In the Orthodox East this binary principle of Word and Sacrament is expressed in the two Entrances. The Little Entrance, which takes place after the litanies and psalmody at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, gives prominence of place to the Gospel book, which the deacon carries high in the procession. This procession may be regarded as the walk to Emmaus, for it introduces the public reading of God's Word. Or, in the words of Justin, "the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the Presider verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."

With the Great Entrance, in which the bread and wine are borne solemnly into the sanctuary, we arrive in the inn at Emmaus, taking our place at "the Lord's table" (1 Corinthians 10:21), that we may know Him in the Breaking of the Bread. The Scriptures are interpreted by the sacramental context of their proclamation, while the knowledge of the risen Christ thus proclaimed reaches its proper fulfillment in the Holy Communion, the mystic reception of the risen, glorified Body and Blood of the Lion of Judah. "Lord, abide with us," we say, "for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

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