

November 4, 2007

## Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

In comparison with the other three gospels, John's is perhaps most distinctive by the relative lessening of dominical preaching about the *Kingdom* of God, or the *Kingdom* of heaven. This very noun, *basileia* in Greek, appears in John only in the discourse with Nicodemus (3:3,5) and during the trial before Pilate (18:36).

In the latter setting, Jesus calls Himself a King (18:37), a detail consonant with earlier parts of the Gospel (1:49; 6:15; 12:13,15). In the Fourth Gospel, the theme of the Kingdom, so dominant in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is shifted to Jesus Himself, an implicit recognition that *He* is the Kingdom. Under John's pen, this theme becomes more immediately personal; the Kingdom is not even conceptually separable from Jesus. "He is the King of heaven," wrote Origen in the third century, "and as He is wisdom itself [*avtosophia*], and He is righteousness itself [*avtodikaiosyne*], and He is truth itself [*avtoaletheia*], no less is He the kingdom itself [*avtobasileia*]" (*Commentary on Matthew* 14.7). For this reason, in John's Gospel it is Christology that embraces what the Synoptic Gospels call the Kingdom.

John begins by identifying God's Son as the "Word," a term he uses only within its first fourteen verses of this gospel. This restraint is significant, because it leads to the culminating assertion, "and the Word became [*egeneto*] flesh and dwelt among us." That is to say, the identification of the Word is relevant for John only with respect to the Incarnation, the Word's becoming flesh, the eternal becoming temporal, the transcendent becoming spatial, the divine becoming human. Everything else that follows in John's account--all the words (2:22; 4:41,50; 5:24,38; 7:36,40; 8:31,37,43,51,52; 10:19; 12:48; 14:23,24; 15:3,20; 17:6,14,17) and signs (2:11,23; 3:2; 4:54; 6:2,14,26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:18,37; 20:30) of Jesus--rests on the foundation of this "becoming" (*egeneto*), this radical event of the Incarnation.

This is the basis for all the revelation that comes through Jesus: "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (2 John 7). For John this is the most radical affirmation of the Christian faith: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2). The Incarnation is, moreover, the root of man's new life, because the Word's birth from man is what makes possible man's birth from God (John 1:13; 1 John 5:18).

>From these observations it is clear that John's identification of Jesus Christ as God's Word is not only metaphysical, but also soteriological. He is the Savior (4:42) because He is the Word made flesh. The Word's life "was the light of men" (1:4). In Him God was revealed (1:14), and in this knowledge of God consists eternal life (17:3). This knowledge of God is conveyed in the living person of the Word made flesh. The signs that He enacts reveal the divine glory (2:11; 11:40; 12:41). God's word is truth (17:17); the Word incarnate is the same truth (14:6).

For this reason, John identifies Christ as "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (1:9). It is impossible, perhaps, to exaggerate the importance of the image of light (*phos*) in John. Indeed, a simple word count is instructive here. In the Fourth Gospel this noun is found 23 times, whereas we find it only 15 times in the other three gospels combined. It is also worth remarking that John does not use this noun after chapter 12, prior to the account of the Passion; this "light" pertains directly to the Lord's public ministry, the manifestation of the divine glory in His words and signs.

This image of the light is also soteriological as well as metaphysical. That is to say, Jesus is the Light with specific reference to man's salvation: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (8:12). Hence, just prior to the Passion narrative Jesus warns, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (12:35-36). And shortly later, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (12:46).

©2007 Patrick Henry Reardon

**All Saints Orthodox Church**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**  
4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641  
Church Office: (773) 777-0749  
<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

**Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor**  
[phrii@touchstonemag.com](mailto:phrii@touchstonemag.com)

**Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:**  
[www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html)  
**Pastoral Ponderings:**  
[http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral\\_ponderings.php](http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php)