

July 19, 2009

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The traditional triadic outline of soteriology, which we have seen in Maximus, was further elaborated in the fourteenth century by St. Nicholas Cabasilas, who developed this theme by way of commentary on the Sacrament of Holy Anointing, or Chrismation.

This sacrament represents, for Nicholas, "the point of contact" between God's nature and ours (*The Life in Christ* 3.2-3). It is, thus, an image of the Incarnation, in which the humanity of Christ is infused with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit-filled humanity of Christ becomes the medium of our sanctification. In the unique mediation of Jesus we are united to God: "He left no barrier [*kolyma*] standing which could separate us from Him."

Apart from Christ, however, there is a threefold barrier separating us from God. "Human beings" writes Nicholas, "are separated from God in three ways--- through nature, through sin, through death" (*trixos tou Theou tous anthropous diistamenous*---*dia ten physin, dia ten hamartian, dia ton thanaton*).

The first "barrier" between God and man, he says, is a disparity of natures; "God remained by Himself alone, and our nature was human and nothing more." This barrier, effected by Creation itself, corresponds to the disparity of existence (*einai*) that we saw in Maximus the Confessor.

There is a second barrier, however, which consists in the corruption of the will--the disobedience of sin! We recall, from Maximus, that for man "to exist well" (*eu einai*) there was needed the cooperation of the human will. Man's will, however, has been corrupted by the fall of Adam.

And there is a third barrier, which is death, the corruption introduced when "by one man's sin death entered the world." Maximus, we recall, spoke of death as preventing man from "existing forever" (*aei einai*). Following him, Nicholas says, "Death is still a third barrier to abiding with God."

God's Son, however, Christ the Savior, removes all three barriers:

First, the barrier of nature, *anthropotetos metaschon*---"by partaking of our humanity." Nicholas explains, "This division gave way when God became man, thus removing the separation between Godhead and manhood. . . . When our

nature is deified in the Savior's body, nothing separates the human race from God."

Second, the barrier of sin, *nekrotheis epi tou Stavrou*---"by suffering death on the Cross." Nicholas says, "As the Savior removed the first by becoming incarnate, He removed the second by being crucified. . . . The Cross delivered us from sin. Since Baptism has the power of His Cross and death, we proceed to the Anointing, the participation in the Spirit."

Third, the barrier of death, *to de televtaion teichos, ten tou thanatou tyrranida, pantapasi tes physeos echsebalen anastas*---"By rising from the dead, He overthrew the final wall, the tyranny of death." The Resurrection of Christ is essential to our Redemption, because "it is necessary that the heirs of the immortal God should be set free from corruption." We will be completely saved when, at the end of time, we rise from the dead. The "cause" of this resurrection, says Nicholas, is the Resurrection of Christ: "After the common resurrection of human beings [*meta gar ten koinen ton anthropon anastasin*], of which the Savior's Resurrection is the cause [*hes aition he tou Soteris anastasis*], the mirror and the dimness (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12) recede, and those purified in heart shall see God face to face."

The work of salvation, therefore, is vastly more than the satisfaction of God's offended honor. It addresses every aspect of man's separation from God. In Maximus and Nicholas, as in the Fathers generally, the "causality" (*aitia*) of salvation is discerned through its full effects. It consists in man's total transformation---body and soul---in Christ. Because salvation includes also the final conferral of immortality, it will not be perfect until Christ returns to raise the dead. Death represents man's final separation from God (Romans 6:21,23; 8:2,6,38). This is why the vocabulary of salvation normally appears in the future tense in the Epistle to the Romans.

Salvation is complete when "death, the final enemy, is destroyed." Nicholas comments, "He would not have called it an enemy unless it were an obstacle to our true happiness."

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