

April 6, 2014
Last Sunday of Lent

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings Into Thy Hands

According to the Evangelist Luke, Jesus' final invocation to the Father included a line from this psalm: 'Abba, beyadka 'aphqid rhuchi—"Father, into Thy hands I entrust my spirit!" In his first recorded words the Savior, in anticipation of his redemptive work, declared, "I must be about the things of my Father" (Luke 2:49). Now, in the final prayer before his death, he lays all those "things of my Father" back into the Father's hands.

Christians do a bold thing in praying this psalm, for they assume to themselves the very voice of the beloved Son. This prayer is made in persona Filii. Jesus directs it to the Father—Abba!—in response to His declaration, "You are My beloved Son, in you I am well pleased!" To pray this psalm is to identify ourselves with that beloved Son, letting him pray through us. In this prayer we express our participation, by divine grace, in his relationship to the Father.

No one, after all, knows the Father except the Son and the one "to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). Our only access to God is through Christ and the mediation of his atoning blood. Our incorporation into Christ is the foundation of all our prayer. Only in Christ do we call God our Father. The only prayer that passes beyond the veil, to His very throne, is prayer saturated with the redeeming blood of Christ. This is the prayer that cries out more eloquently than the blood of Abel.

In this psalm, then, the voice of Christ becomes our own voice, celebrating the righteousness with which He has redeemed us: "In Thee, O Lord, I put my trust, let me not be put to shame for ever. Deliver me in Thy righteousness (betsidqateka) . . . Thou hast redeemed me, Lord God of truth. . . . But I trust in the Lord. I will exult and rejoice in Thy mercy. . . . But as for me, I trust in Thee, O Lord; I say, 'Thou art my God' ('Elohai 'Attah) . . . Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast preserved for those who fear Thee, which Thou hast prepared for those who trust in Thee."

The “righteousness” (tsedeq) of God is our salvation in Christ, “whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness” (Rom. 3:25).

Likewise, this trust in God is the source of our sanctification, according to the words of the standard Orthodox prayer: “O God . . . who sanctify those who put their trust in You.”

This committing of their souls to God in loving trust is not just one of the things Christians do; it is, rather, the essential feature of the life in Christ: “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19). This is what Jesus accomplished on the Cross.

In this psalm we enter into the sentiments and thoughts of Jesus in his sufferings, ending in the prayer by which he entrusted his life, death, and destiny to the Father. We feel the Passion “from the inside.” In this psalm is recorded the plot, described in the Gospels, to take his life (cf. Mark 3:6; 14:1): “Pull me out of the net that they have secretly laid for me. . . . Fear is on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life.”

Here, too, are the false witnesses rising against him (cf. Mark 14:55–59): “Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.”

Here, as well, we hear of the flight of his friends and the mockery of his enemies (cf. Mark 14:50; 15:29–32): “I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors, and I am repulsive to those who know me; those who see me outside flee from me. I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind.”

The reason the voice of Christ in his Passion must become our own voice is that his Passion itself provides the pattern for our own lives. He was very clear on the point: “But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues” (Matthew 10:17). And, “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake (24:9).”

Throughout this psalm, therefore, there is an ongoing changing of verbal tenses between past and future. Even as we taste the coming enjoyment of God’s eternal

presence, hope's struggle in this world continues: "For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope."

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