

April 8, 2007

Pascha

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

According to Matthew 27:43, one of the blasphemers at the foot of Jesus' cross cried out, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

There is irony in the fact that this jeer, though sacrilegious, had about it something of the quality of a prayer. In fact, the blasphemer himself was quoting a prayer, specifically Psalm 22:9, "He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"

Although it is evident that the blasphemer did not intend this taunt as a prayer, it also seems obvious that God received it as a prayer, because He answered it as a prayer. That is to say, God caused to come to pass what the blasphemer mockingly wished for. God *did* deliver Jesus. He vindicated Him as His very Son, because He *did*, in fact, "delight in Him."

There are several things to be said about the mystery of the Resurrection in this respect.

The Resurrection of the Son was God's vindication of Jesus' claims, first of all. It was God's affirmation that Jesus was truly the holy and innocent One, who had been condemned to death unjustly. In this act of raising Jesus from the dead, therefore, God testified that He would not let His holy One see corruption. This is certainly how St. Peter explained the matter on Pentecost Sunday, when he quoted Psalm 16: "Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27).

The Resurrection, then, was God's justification of Jesus, the divine witness whereby He testified to Jesus' identity and His righteousness.

Second, in raising Jesus from the dead, God manifested His own righteousness. By vindicating this righteous Man unjustly put to death, God showed Himself on the side of righteousness. God vindicated thereby His own zeal for righteousness, not permitting this Holy One to see corruption. The very vindication that was sought by Job was granted in Jesus, the definitive revelation that God is righteous. In raising Jesus from the dead, God radically demonstrated His own righteousness.

The Apostle Paul affirmed this truth when he wrote of Jesus, "whom God set forth to be a means of expiation by His blood, through faith, *to demonstrate His righteousness*, because of His forbearance, in passing over of sins previously committed, to provide a demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, *that He might be just* and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:25-26 emphasis added).

The Resurrection of Jesus presents us, then, with the great defining truth of history--namely, that God is on the side of righteousness. God provides the demonstration (*endeixsis*) of this in raising up Jesus from the dead.

Much of history, after all, seems to declare exactly the opposite. A good deal of history has led men to believe that God is not righteous. Indeed, some men, rather than reach such a conclusion, have preferred simply to conclude that there is no God.

The Resurrection of Jesus is the answer to all those objections. It is presented in the Gospel as the defining revelation of the radical righteousness of God and His righteous resolve with respect to the destiny of man.

Third, this vindication of God's righteousness refers not only to God's purpose with respect to history in general, but more specifically to the completion of biblical history. The resurrection of Christ is the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies that bind the New Testament to the Old.

Fourth, God's righteousness is salvific righteousness. Redemption does not mean, as some have thought, that Christ delivers us from the righteousness of God. On the contrary, it is in Christ that we are delivered *by* the righteousness of God. He manifests His righteousness by making us righteous in Christ. It is God's righteousness that effects salvation on the earth, as He says in Isaiah, "My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth" (51:5).

And it is by reason of the Resurrection of Christ that we, through faith, "become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus St. Paul affirms that Jesus was raised from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25).

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