

February 21, 2016  
Sunday of the Publican's Prayer

### Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Before declaring that He is the Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus first likens Himself to the door of the sheepfold: "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. . . . I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:7, 9). The doorway in this text is John's metaphor for the mediation of Christ. He is the sole way through which human beings have access to God. He is "the absolute door of the Trinity" (Adrienne von Speyer).

The meaning conveyed in this Johannine metaphor is identical with that in St. Paul's affirmation, "God is one, and one is the mediator of God and human beings (anthropon), the human being (anthropos) Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 2:5).

One observes the apparent ease with which the apostle refers to God's Son as a human being. One discerns no hesitation in Paul's inclusion of Christ's humanity in His personal unity. Because of this inclusion, the personal unity of Christ "can as accurately be designated human as divine" (Donald J. O'Keefe, *Covenant Theology*, page 473).

The inclusion of Christ's humanity in His personal unity prompted the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, to declare Him to be "simultaneously complete in divinity and complete in humanity," to be "of one being (omoousios) with the Father with respect to His divinity and simultaneously of one being (homoousios) with us with respect to His humanity." Two centuries later, the Church's ascription of humanity to the personal unity of Christ was the basis for the condemnation of Monenergism at Constantinople III.

The affirmation of full divinity and full humanity in Jesus distinguishes His mediation from that of other intermediary figures in ancient religious theories. The Christian Church has always refused to think of Him as positioned half-way between God and humanity. He is neither an Übermensch nor a lesser god. He is not a mediator in the sense of being positioned half-way between God and humanity. He is not a neutral arbiter or cosmic go-between. He is neither a divine emanation nor a human exception. Nor is Christ simply an intermediary who has both divine and human qualities. The true faith does not permit Christ to be described as partly divine and partly human. Above all, He is not a tertium quid.

At one time or another over the past two millennia of the Incarnation, Jesus has been described in each of these heterodox ways, but the Church's reaction has invariably involved recourse to the Pauline thesis: "God is one, and one is the mediator of God and human beings (anthropon), the human being (anthropos) Jesus Christ." He is God in a full sense and a human being in a full sense—one in being with the Father, and one in being with us.

The mediation of Christ is, moreover, active, not static. We have no access to the divinity of Christ except through what He does and says as a human being. There can be no hint of a quantitative measure—more or less—in the Orthodox conception of the Hypostatic Union. Exactly the same Person is both fully divine and fully human. There is no personal division in Jesus Christ. He is a "single reality"—*mia physis*, in the expression of Saint Cyril of Alexandria, who had in mind to deny that the divinity and humanity in Christ constituted two personal or

grammatical subjects. It is not as though God's Son was looking over the shoulder and observing the thoughts of the man Jesus. On the contrary, there is in Christ a single acting subject---one thinker, one consciousness, one reflective being, one feeler, one speaker, one doer---a single "I," a single "you," a single "he."

For this reason it is quite impossible to "over-emphasize" the humanity of Christ. Since Christ is one in Person, His divinity cannot be lessened by an alleged "excessive" attention to His humanity. Indeed, unless the ascription is taken to imply sin, Jesus simply cannot be portrayed as "too human." On the contrary, we know His divinity only through what is discerned in His humanity. We gain no better grasp of Christ by paying less attention to what He does and says-and feels-as a human being. Orthodox theology affords us no unmediated vantage point, as it were---no angled vision---to look past the humanity of Christ in order to gain a glimpse of the divine Person. Indeed, the attempt to do so has been the source of several heresies.

Orthodox dogma obliges us to affirm, rather, that Christ is not rendered less divine by the fatigue that prompts Him to sit down at the Samaritan well. (No need for theological double-think here. He was no more "consenting" to be tired than He was "pretending" to be tired. He was just tired, like the rest of us.) Nor, on the other hand, is Christ less human when He declares, "the Father and I are one." His divinity is diminished by neither His not-knowing where Lazarus lay buried nor the tears He shed at the tomb.