

**March 20, 2005**  
**The Triumph of Orthodoxy**

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Interpreting the death and resurrection of Jesus in the light of biblical literature (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4), the early Christians savored the contrast between the disobedience of Adam and the obedience of Christ. They perceived that whereas the first man attempted, in rebellion, to become God's equal, the second, "being in the form of God, did not regard being equal to God a usurpation (*harpagmos*), but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in shape as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:6-8).

In the Epistle to the Romans the Apostle Paul elaborated that disparity between Adam and Jesus, observing that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (5:19).

We do well to bear in mind the traditional contrast of the obedient Jesus with the disobedient Adam when we come to the Gospel accounts of our Lord's struggle at Gethsemane, the place of His betrayal. The very name of this place (Mark 14:22; Matthew 26:36) means "olive garden," abbreviated to simply "a garden" by John (18:1).

This garden of Jesus' trial was, first of all, a place of sadness, the sorrow of death itself. "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful," said He, "even unto death" (Mark 14:34; Matthew 26:38). This sorrow unto death is common to the two gardens of man's trial.

In the garden of disobedience, the Lord spoke to Adam of his coming death, whereby he would return to the dust from which he was taken. Adam's curse introduces man's sadness unto death. Thus, in the Septuagint version of this story the Lord tells Eve, "I will greatly multiply your sorrows (*lypas*)," and "in sorrows (*en lypais*) you will bear your children." And to her husband the Lord declares, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrows (*en lypais*) you shall eat of it all the days of your life (Genesis 3:16,17,19).

Significantly, the Gospel accounts of the Lord's obedience in the garden emphasize His sadness more than His fear. Jesus said in the garden, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful (*perilypos*), even unto death." The context of this assertion indicates that Jesus assumed the primeval curse of our sorrow unto death, in order to reverse the disobedience of Adam. In the garden Jesus took our grief upon Himself, praying "with vehement cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). In the garden He bore our sadness unto death, becoming the "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:4).

Thus, St. Ambrose of Milan, commenting on the agony in the garden, says of Jesus: "Nowhere do I wonder more at His piety and majesty, because it would have profited me less if He had not assumed my own feelings (*nisi meum suscepisset affectum*). Therefore, the One that had no reason to sorrow for Himself sorrowed for me, and leaving aside the enjoyment of His eternal divinity He is afflicted with the weariness of my infirmity. He assumed my sadness (*suscepit tristitiam meam*), in order to confer on me His joy, and in our footsteps He descended even to the sorrow of death (*ad mortis aerumnam*), in order to recall us to life in His own footsteps."

In the garden Jesus returns to the very place of Adam's fall, taking on Himself Adam's sorrow unto death. Thus, Ambrose regards Christ's assumption of man's sadness in the garden as integral to the Incarnation itself. He comments, "Therefore, I confidently use the word 'sadness,' because I preach the Cross, because He did not assume the appearance of the Incarnation, but its truth. Consequently, He had to take on grief (*dolorem suscipere*), in order to overcome sadness (*tristitiam*), not to exclude it. The praise of fortitude does not belong to those who bear the numbness, but rather the pain, of wounds" (*Homiliae in Lucam* 10.56).

The commiserating Christ bears in the garden the very sorrow incurred by fallen mankind. In this garden scene St. Cyril of Alexandria places on the lips of Jesus the following explanation of His grief: "What vinedresser, when his vineyard is desolate and laid waste, will feel no anguish for it? What shepherd would be so harsh and stern as to suffer nothing on account of his perishing flock? These are the causes of My grief. For these things am I sorrowful" (*Homiliae in Lucam* 146).

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