

July 26, 2009

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

St Nicholas Cabasilas, after elaborating the tripartite structure of soteriology in his comments on the Sacrament of Chrismation, comes to the third and supreme sacrament of Christian Initiation, the Holy Eucharist (*The Life in Christ* 4.1-2).

Unlike Baptism and Chrismation, Nicholas says, this third initiation rite is repeated for the faithful during the course of their Christian life: "It helps the initiate after their Initiation, when the ray of light derived from the Sacred Mysteries must be revived after being obscured by the darkness of sins. To revive those that fade away and die because of their sins is the work of the Sacred Table alone" (4.3). Our habits of sin make reception of the Holy Eucharist a lifelong necessity.

We all continue to fall, Nicholas explains, nor can we, solely by our own efforts, be reconciled to God. In this respect, he quotes Romans 2:23---"You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" Nicholas Cabasilas thus---and as though out of the blue---introduces the theme central to the soteriology of St. Anselm: God's offended honor.

Indeed, Nicholas goes on to explain this point, in lines that are nearly Greek translations from Anselm's Latin. He speaks of Christ, who "alone was able to render all honor [*timen*] due to the One who begot Him and make satisfaction [*apologesthasthai*] for that which was taken away, achieving the former by His life and the latter by His death. To outweigh the injury which we had committed, He introduced the death He died on the Cross unto the Father's glory, thereby making abundant satisfaction for the debt of honor we owed [*opheilometha timen*] by reason of our sins" (4.4).

Nicholas is clearly reliant here on Anselm, and it seems important to remark on this reliance. In fact, throughout his treatise on the Incarnation---Cur Deus Homo? ---Anselm treats many of the same soteriological themes as Cabasilas and the Church

Fathers: The integrity of two natures in Christ (2.7) and the unity of His person (2.9), the freedom of Christ's will in the Passion (1.8; 2.17), man's destiny to beatitude (2.1), and the final grace of the bodily resurrection (2.3). Although the soteriology of Anselm seems rather thin beside that of Cabasilas, the latter theologian detects no heresy in it, and, when it suits his purpose, he does not hesitate to incorporate Anselm's thought into his own reflections.

As we noted above, Nicholas uses Anselm's "satisfaction theory" in his discussion of the Holy Eucharist. The body of Christ received in the Holy Communion, Nicholas affirms, is the same body in which the Savior "made satisfaction for our sins": It sweat blood in the agony, received lashes upon the back, was pierced with nails. It is to this very body, which "became the treasury of the fullness of the Godhead," that the believer is united in the Eucharist (*The Life in Christ* 4.5).

Although there is also the sacrament (*mysterion*) of confession which, "when men repent of their sins and confess them to the priests, delivers them from every punishment of God the Judge," yet even this sacrament is inadequate without participation in the Lord's table. This is why, says Nicholas, we are to approach that table "frequently," inasmuch as "it is the only remedy against sin."

All righteousness before God, Nicholas reminds us, comes through the immolated body of Christ. Human righteousness counts for nothing. "But once men are united to Christ's flesh and blood by partaking of them, immediately the greatest benefits ensue: the forgiveness of sins and the inheritance of the Kingdom, which are the fruits of Christ's righteousness."

In the Holy Eucharist, he goes on, we receive the whole Christ, everything that was assumed in the Incarnation, "soul, mind, will, everything that is human." These God's Son took on "in order to be united to the whole of our nature in order to penetrate us and assimilate us into Himself by totally uniting what is proper to Him with what is proper to us."

"Thus, it is clear," says Nicholas, "that God infuses Himself into us and mingles Himself with us, changing and transforming us into Him," as "when iron is united to fire and thereby takes on the properties of fire" (4.6). For Cabasilas the Eucharist extends to men the salvation effected in the Incarnation, on the Cross, and in the Resurrection.

©2009 Patrick Henry Reardon

All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor

phrii@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:

www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

Pastoral Ponderings:

http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php