

May 4, 2014

Myrrhbearers' Sunday

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The Apostles' proclamation of the Resurrection determined the dominant rhetorical form in which that event was thought about. Perhaps its most striking feature, at least for us who are more accustomed to later liturgical language, is the use of the passive voice. In that earlier usage, it is said either that Jesus was raised, or that God raised him. The Apostle Peter, in his first sermon, set the standard when he spoke of Jesus, "whom God raised up (anestesēn)" (Acts 2:24, 32).

Although the verbs vary between forms of *egeiro* and *anistemi*, this "passive" quality of the Resurrection is common in the apostolic sermons recorded by Luke. In his sermon on Solomon's Porch Peter speaks of "the Prince of life, whom God raised (*egeiren*) from the dead" (3:15) and goes on to declare, "God, having raised (*anastesas*) His servant Jesus, sent him to bless you" (3:26; cf. 3:22). Called to account by the Sanhedrin, Peter again proclaims Jesus, "whom God raised (*egeiren*) from the dead" (4:10). To Cornelius and his friends, Peter says of Jesus, "God raised him" (10:40).

In Paul's preaching the identical rhetoric prevails. Thus, Paul, in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, declares of Jesus, "God raised (*egeiren*) him from the dead" (13:30). Without missing a beat or altering the message, Paul then switches verbs twice more before the sermon is over: God "raised (*anastesas*) Jesus" (13:33), "He raised (*anestesēn*) him from the dead" (13:34), and "He whom God raised (*egeiren*) saw no corruption" (13:37).

The reason for this "passive" emphasis is, I think, fairly simple. In the Church's earliest preaching the message of the Resurrection was the culmination of a larger historical narrative in which God was the active character. The sermon at Pisidian Antioch illustrates this structure. Paul comes to the Resurrection only after establishing a narrative that begins with the Exodus, goes on to the Conquest, and then describes the periods of the judges and the kings. In each stage, God is the actor; He it is who "chose our fathers, and exalted the people," "brought them out of [Egypt]," "put up with their ways in the wilderness," "distributed their land to them by allotment," "gave judges for about four hundred and fifty years," and, when they asked for a king, "gave them Saul the son of Kish." Afterwards, "when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king" (13:17-22).

Only after this lengthy account of the divine work in history, the *magnalia Dei*, does Paul come to the properly Christian message, which begins with the mission of John the Baptist (13:24-25). The death and Resurrection of Jesus (13:27-38) comes as the climax of a long history of divine intervention in history. Thus, the Resurrection of Jesus is God's act.

When Paul later adapted this narrative style in his one recorded sermon to pagans, he preserved the passive form when he spoke of the Resurrection: "[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world with justice by the Man whom He has designated. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead" (17:31).

According to its earliest form of expression, then, the Resurrection of Christ is the act of the Father; this perspective is ubiquitous and dominant in the New Testament.

Thus Paul, in his earliest epistle, Paul exhorts his beloved Macedonians "to wait for [God's] Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Jesus is called Lord because "God also highly exalted him" (Philippians 2:8; Acts 2:36).

Other New Testament writers follow suit. It was the "the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead" (Hebrews 13:20).

Again, it was "God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory" (1 Peter 1:20).

This "passive" perspective of the Resurrection found its way into the Gospel accounts, as well. According to Mark, the angel tells the Myrrhbearers, "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised (egerthe)" (Mark 16:6). Matthew's version of the story maintains the same vocabulary; the angel declares to the women, "He is not here, for he has been raised (egerthe). . . . Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has been raised (egerthe) from the dead" (Matthew 28:6-7). It is the same in Luke: The angel tells the women, "He is not here, but has been raised (egerthe)" (Luke 24:6). The Apostles later declare, "Indeed, the Lord has been raised (egerthe) and has appeared to Simon!" (24:34; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:4-5). The later addition to Mark's Gospel preserves the identical usage, saying that the Apostles "did not believe those who had seen him after he was raised (egegermenon)" (16:14).

God the Father, according to this primitive formulation of the Mystery, is the One who raises from the dead. This is the same God who will raise us up, as well: "He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus" (2 Corinthians 4:14). For this reason, we "believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:24; Galatians 1:1). Again, "God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power (dynamis)" (1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:15). To us believers God will demonstrate this same dynamis "which He worked in Christ when

He raised him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19-20). In Baptism, "you were jointly raised, through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

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