June 18, 2006

All Saints' Sunday

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Our reflections on the anthropology of the Resurrection would be incomplete without some attention to history and psychology, because these two subjects are integral to our understanding of what it means to be a human being.

First, then, what does the Resurrection of Christ mean to human history? In truth it begins an entirely new and defining phase of history, because it introduces into human experience, for the first time, a transcendent and utterly certain foundation for hope. It is the absolute *novum quid*.

With God's vindication of Jesus of Nazareth, there was posited into history, through the preaching of the Apostles, an entirely new thesis with respect to human destiny. For those that put themselves under the sway of the Gospel, history could no longer be "more of the same," or "business as usual," because the Resurrection of Christ conferred on history something it had never known before--a metaphysical *telos*, a goal, a directing and energizing purpose deliberately placed into the process itself.

Since that first Christian Pascha, the Resurrection of Christ has worked as yeast in the dough of the human enterprise, actively kneading that history toward its final shape. Those who confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God has raised Him from the dead stand most literally "on the side of history."

For this reason the Orthodox Church celebrates Pascha by beginning the first book of Christian history, the Acts of the Apostles, and all through the Paschal season regular readings from this book replace the normal reading from the New Testament epistles during the Divine Liturgy. This Book of Acts records the first thirty years or so of mankind's new history, Church History. We appropriately commence our reading of it in the liturgical context of the Resurrection, because it enunciates to the world the *novum quid*.

Throughout the history of the Church the Resurrection of Christ is the perennial source of power and renewal. This is the reason the Church

has survived its worst enemies and always will. All of Christian history thus becomes a revelation and extension of the Resurrection. Christians live and thrive on the compound interest of the Paschal Mystery, a limitless font of joy, strength, perseverance, and victory in the face of the myriad demonic forces raised against them.

Second, the proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ is the announcement of true human psychology, this term being understood in its ancient and etymological sense as "the study of the soul."

Classical philosophy, regarding the human soul as the permanent and essential part of a man, did not understand its relationship with the human body, which is manifestly impermanent. There were various theories on this subject, but scarcely any philosopher regarded the soul as "incomplete" without the body. Some, in fact, thought of the union of body and soul as an aberration, a fall from the soul's proper spiritual state. Many even regarded the soul and body as mutual enemies, and those who, like Plato, believed in the soul's native immortality, were not disposed to think its departure from the body as much to be mourned. Such was the argument that Socrates elaborated for Phaedo and his friends as he prepared to drink the hemlock.

The doctrine of the Resurrection, which posits the reunion of soul and body as man's permanent and proper state, stands as an affront to theories of this sort. It is no wonder that the Athenians and others treated this doctrine with derision and as a species of madness (Acts 17:32; 26:23-24; 1 Corinthians 15:12). They laughed, because pagan philosophy was overly taxed by the preaching of the Resurrection; "our reason cannot conceive such things as the resurrection of bodies," wrote St. Bonaventure . Consequently, those pagan philosophers "were unaware that the world had an end and that bodies would rise from their dust" (*In Hexaemeron* 7.6).

Apart from the Resurrection, that is to say, philosophy rather deeply misunderstood the very nature of the soul, thinking of it as a separate and independent entity, maintaining its essential being apart from the body. This was a serious aberration characteristic of all classical philosophy. According to the Christian faith and hope, in contrast, the final perfection of man will include the reunion of his soul and body, and the soul itself will remain incomplete, even in heaven, until that reunion at the final resurrection.

In the thirteenth century, when much of the Scholastic movement tried to treat philosophy as an autonomous source of wisdom, a *scientia separata* independent of divine revelation, St. Bonaventure appealed to the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection as part of his ongoing critique of that effort. Without the Gospel of the Resurrection, he argued, philosophy was unable even to understand the human soul. "Assured eternity," he wrote, "is incompatible with the possibility of loss, and it is certain that perfect peace is possible only in the reunion of body and soul. If, then, the soul is essentially disposed toward the body, the soul is fully at peace only after the body has been returned to it" (7.5). For this reason, heaven itself will be incomplete until the resurrection of the dead and the restoration of man's psychological integrity.

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