

What Christ Accomplished on the Cross

by Hieromonk Damascene

Christ's death on the Cross broke down the barriers of nature, sin, and death, allowing mankind to be redeemed and forgiven of sins.

Topics: "The Cross", "Redemption"

Description

Hieromonk Damascene delves into the profound topic of Christ's redemptive work on the Cross, emphasizing the significance of His incarnation, death, and Resurrection in restoring mankind to a state even higher than Adam's pre-Fall condition. The sermon explores the primordial state of man before the Fall, the consequences of the Fall, and the means of redemption through Christ's sacrificial death. It concludes with the transformative consequences of Christ's redemptive work, offering a glimpse into the future glory of a renewed creation and the potential for mankind to be deified by God's grace.

Transcript

The topic of today's talk--what Christ accomplished on the Cross--is of course a prime subject of contemplation during the Lenten season, as we prepare to prayerfully commemorate Christ's passion, death, and the inevitable consequence of His death: His holy Resurrection. As we call to mind and repent of our sins during the Holy Fast, we also call to mind that which has saved us from the eternal consequences of sin. We call to mind Christ's life-creating death on the Cross, which He underwent for the salvation of each one of us.

The Orthodox dogma of our redemption--which includes the doctrines concerning Christ's incarnation, death and Resurrection--is the chief dogma of our Faith, together with the dogma of the Holy Trinity. I have been especially contemplating and reading Patristic writings on this subject for a few years now. It is a vast subject. In this lecture I will try to outline its main points in a linear and chronological fashion. I will speak about the state of man before the Fall and after the Fall, and then speak about how Christ saved us from the consequences of the Fall through His incarnation, death and Resurrection. Finally, I will summarize all the present and future accomplishments of Christ's redemptive work.

1. The Primordial State

Let us begin by discussing the state of man and the world before the Fall. A right understanding of this pre-Fall state is actually essential to a right understanding of the meaning of Christ's death on the Cross. We have to understand what Adam fell from in order to understand what Christ restores us to.

According to the Patristic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, before the Fall man's body was not subject to death and corruption. He was made potentially immortal, that is, if he had not sinned he could have lived forever in an incorrupt body, partaking of the Tree of Life in the Garden. Before the Fall, man knew no pain, no sickness. He was not subject to old age. He was not subject to the elements; he could not be physically hurt. He knew no decay. His body, while still material and sensual, was more spiritual than the body we inhabit now. It was not grossly material, like the body we now have. [1]

At his creation from the dust of the ground, man was created in Grace. The Holy Fathers (such as St. John Damascene) say that Adam's body and soul were created at the same time, and that when God breathed a living soul into him, He breathed also into him the Grace of the Holy Spirit. [2] Before the Fall, the first man and the first woman had the Holy Spirit abiding within them.

The first man was not deified at the time of his creation, but he was created for deification, for union with God. [3] By drawing ever closer to God in love, by seeking spiritual pleasure in God rather than physical pleasure through His senses, man was to become ever more holy and spiritual, ever more in the likeness of God, ever more transformed and deified by the Grace of God. Since God is limitless and unfathomable, the path of union with God was never to end. Man was created a little lower than the angels (Ps. 8:5, Heb. 2:7), but he eventually was to become higher than the angels, higher even than the highest ranks of the angels: "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim."

Moreover, as man became more spiritual and divinized by drawing closer to God, he was to make all of creation more spiritual and divinized as well, drawing everything closer to God. Many Holy Fathers--such as St. Macarius the Great, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Maximos the Confessor--teach that the entire creation was incorrupt before the Fall just as man was incorrupt: for the entire creation had been made for man. [4] St. Symeon the New Theologian states explicitly that not only Paradise was incorrupt before the Fall: everything, the whole creation, was without death and corruption. [5] Because he possessed both body and soul, man was the link between this incorrupt material world and the noetic world of the angels. As such, he was to unite the material world with the noetic world through his own ascent to God. [6]

2. The Consequences of the Fall

Such was the lofty original state of man and the creation, and such was man's lofty original calling. But as we all know and experience every day, the first man, Adam, fell from this state and brought himself and all of creation into a state of corruption and death.

The whole story of the Fall and why it occurred lies outside the scope of this lecture. What concerns us here, as we contemplate the theology of redemption, is the consequences of the Fall. Just as we must understand what we fell from in order to understand what Christ restores us to, so also we must understand what we fell into in order to understand what Christ delivers us out of.

To put it another way: through His death on the Cross and through His Resurrection, Christ gives us life. In order to understand what it means to be given life, we must understand the death into which we have been born.

As you will recall, in the book of Genesis God told Adam: Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:17). Now, we know that Adam did not die on the day he ate from the tree: according to the Scriptures he lived to be 930 years

old. But according to St. Gregory Palamas and other Fathers, God's words were true: Adam did die on the day he ate the fruit. He died spiritually. He lost the Divine Grace in which he had been created. [7] He no longer had the Holy Spirit abiding within him. Because his nature had become corrupted, deifying Grace was now foreign to it. Before, God Himself abode within him through His Uncreated Energy. Now man became empty, devoid of Grace. He was separated from God. And, according to St. Gregory Palamas, this spiritual death made Adam subject to physical death, which in his case occurred after 930 years. [8]

At the Fall, man's nature was changed. He still had the image of God in him, but now he had become corrupted. His spiritual corruption made his body more grossly material, subject to physical corruption or decay after death. Also, his spiritual corruption made his soul unable to partake of eternal union with God after death. Paradise had been barred to Adam during his earthly life, and both Paradise and heaven remained barred to him after death. After their death, Adam, Eve, and all their posterity went down into hades: a place of waiting, of separation from God. [9]

Also, at the Fall, all of creation fell into corruption along with man: decay and death were introduced into the creation. In Romans 5:12 St. Paul says that By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and a little later, in Romans 8:20-21, he says that the creation entered into corruption because of man's sin.

We are all the inheritors of the death and corruption that entered into man's nature at the Fall. St. Gregory Palamas says that, through Adam's one spiritual death, both spiritual and physical death were passed onto all men. [10] This is because human nature is one: we are all of the family of Adam.

Orthodoxy does not accept the idea that we are guilty of Adam's sin. No, Adam alone was guilty of his sin. However, we do share the consequences of his sin. We are born into corruption, and with an inherited tendency or inclination toward sin. All of us sin, and so we deserve the consequences of sin: spiritual and physical death, and eternal separation from God in hades.

Between the time of Adam's fall and the coming of Christ, there were many righteous men and women, whom we read about in the Old Testament. But they, even through their godly lives, were unable to reverse the consequences of the Fall. Grace could act on them from the outside, as it did on the Prophet Moses, so much so that he had to cover his radiant face as he descended from Mount Sinai. However, this was only a temporary radiance, as the Holy Scriptures and Fathers say. [11] He and all the Old Testament prophets did not have the Grace of the Holy Spirit abiding within them, as their personal strength and power. [12] And after death, everyone, even the most righteous, went down into hades, being cut off from Paradise and heaven.

During the Old Testament period, God gave laws to the Hebrews to help them live righteous lives. He instituted animal sacrifices, which the Hebrews were to make as offerings for sin. These sacrifices were a prefiguration of Christ's sacrifice, to prepare the people of God to understand and accept the meaning of Christ's death on the Cross. But neither the sacrifices nor the laws were able to restore mankind to the state he had lost at the Fall.

A perfect, blameless sacrifice was needed--a man who was without sin--in order to destroy the consequences of sin. That was why Christ came. The first Adam fell from his original designation, bringing everything into ruin. Therefore Christ, Who is called the Second Adam or the New Adam, came into the world to fulfill man's original designation and restore what was lost. But Christ did even more than that. He not only restored man to what Adam was before the Fall: He gave man the possibility to become that which Adam was supposed to become, what Adam could have become had he not fallen.

3. The Means of Redemption

Now, having looked at the pre-Fall state and the consequences of the Fall, let us look more closely at how Christ restores man to the pre-Fall state and in fact beyond and above this state.

The how of the redemption, like the nature of God the Holy Trinity, is ultimately a mystery. And yet the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers help us to approach this mystery. They enable us to understand and believe in our redemption by Jesus Christ in such a way that, believing, we can receive the gift of salvation.

Our redemption by Jesus Christ began with His incarnation. When He took flesh, He became like us in everything except sin (cf. Heb. 4:15). In assuming human nature, He deified it. Since human nature is one, this gave us the potential of being deified as well: not deified by nature and Sonship, as Christ was, but deified by Grace and adoption.

But with Christ's incarnation, man was still not able to actualize the potential for deification. Because of his spiritual corruption, man was an impure vessel. Because of the barrier of sin, man could not receive and keep the Grace of the Holy Spirit within himself. So Christ, having overcome the barrier of nature at His incarnation, now had to break down the barrier of sin. He would do this through his death. As St. Nicholas Cabasilas says, Christ broke down the three barriers that separated man from God: the barrier of nature by His incarnation, the barrier of sin by His death, and the barrier of death by His Resurrection. [13]

As God, Christ knew He had come to earth to die for man, and in dying to rise from the grave. On the day before His crucifixion, He said: Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour (John 12:27).

Remember the statement of St. Gregory Palamas which I mentioned earlier: Through his single spiritual death (at the Fall), Adam brought a twofold death into the world--spiritual death and bodily death. St. Gregory goes on to say, "The good Lord healed this twofold death of ours through His single bodily death, and through the one Resurrection of His body He gave us a twofold resurrection. By means of His bodily death He destroyed him who had the power over our souls and bodies in death, and rescued us from his tyranny over both." [14]

This, again, is because human nature is one. St. Paul writes: If by one man's offence death reigned by one [that is, Adam], much more they which receive abundance of Grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign by one, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:17).

Following the words of Christ and St. Paul in the Scriptures, the Holy Fathers use a juridical or legal model to explain how Christ broke down the barrier of sin separating man from God.

The juridical explanation can be expressed in basic terms as follows: At the Fall, death was the sentence for sin. When He died on the Cross, Christ took upon Himself that sentence, but since He was without sin and thus undeserving of the sentence, the sentence was abolished for all mankind, and mankind was freed from the consequences of the primal transgression.

The word "redemption," of course, comes from this juridical explanation. As Vladimir Lossky points out: "The very idea of redemption assumes a plainly legal aspect: it is the atonement of a slave, the debt paid for those who remained in prison because they could not discharge it. [15] By His death Christ ransomed man out of servitude to sin, and redeemed man from the eternal consequences of sin which had been

incurred at the Fall. Christ Himself spoke of this. He said of Himself: The Son of Man came ... to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: Christ is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15). And in the book of Apocalypse: Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy Blood (Apoc. 5:9).

Christ paid the debt of sin that man himself could never pay. The Apostle John writes in his first Epistle: He [Christ] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2). And the Apostle Paul tells us: Ye are bought with a price (I Cor. 6:20, 7:23). St. Paul even says that Christ was made to be sin for us and made a curse for us (II Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13). Being totally without sin, He bore the penalty of sin on our behalf, so that we would be forgiven and purified of sin and freed from its curse. St. Gregory Palamas says: "Since Christ gave His Blood, which was sinless and therefore guiltless, as a ransom for us who were liable to punishment because of our sins, He redeemed us from our guilt. He forgave our sins, tore up the record of them on the Cross and delivered us from the devil's tyranny. [16]

Out of His infinite love for us, Christ died in place of us, so that we could be given life. St. Paul says: ... That He [Christ] by the Grace of God should taste death for every man (Heb. 2:9); and elsewhere he says, God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). St. Athanasius the Great explains this as follows: "Taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to corruption and death, He surrendered His body to death in place of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished. [17]

Together with the juridical model of explaining how we are redeemed by Christ's death, the Holy Scriptures and Holy Fathers use the model of sacrifice. As mentioned earlier, the Old Testament sacrifices were a prefiguration, a "type" of the one true Sacrifice that would be offered for the whole world: Christ, Who was sacrificed on the Cross. In the first Epistle of St. Peter we hear Christ described as a spotless sacrificial lamb: Ye were redeemed with the precious Blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot, Who was foreordained before the foundation of the world (I Peter 1:19-20). And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: Now once at the end of the world Christ hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26).

Many of the Holy Fathers wrote on this theme of Christ as sacrifice. Origen (who is not a Holy Father) and, following him, St. Gregory of Nyssa, posited that the sacrifice was offered to the devil. But St. Gregory the Theologian and all the Fathers after him rejected this idea. They often spoke of the sacrifice as being offered to God the Father, and sometimes they spoke of it as being offered to the Holy Trinity, since the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are One God. St. Symeon the New Theologian writes: "God, Who is incomparably higher than the visible and invisible creation, accepted human nature, which is higher than the whole visible creation, and offered it as a sacrifice to His God and Father.... Honoring the sacrifice, the Father could not leave it in the hands of death. Therefore, He annihilated His sentence. [18]

Why did the Son have to offer Himself in sacrifice to the Father? Why did God sacrifice Himself to God? Here we get at the crux of the mystery of Redemption. St. Gregory the Theologian urges us not to try to conform this mystery to human logic, not apply to it human conceptions that are unworthy of God. He says: "The Father accepts the sacrifice not because He demanded it or felt any need of it, but on account of economy," [19] that is, to fulfill the Divine plan of our salvation in accordance with the Divine ordering of creation.

St. Gregory Palamas sheds more light on this question. He says that God could have found other ways of saving man from sin, mortality and servitude to the devil. But He saved man in the way He did--by coming to earth, dying and resurrecting--because this was according to justice and righteousness. [20] As the Psalmist says: God is righteous and loveth righteousness ... and there is no unrighteousness in Him (Ps. 11:7, 92:15). Death was the just penalty for sin, and Christ paid that penalty. But because He was sinless, His death was unjust. Therefore, He justly destroyed death. This was God's economy, completely in accordance with His righteousness.

The devil thought He could destroy Christ by inciting people to put Him to death. But Christ's death proved to be the devil's undoing because, unlike every other person who had ever lived, Christ did not deserve death. St. John Chrysostom offers us a vivid image to highlight this teaching: "It is as if, at a session of a court of justice, the devil should be addressed as follows: 'Granted that you destroyed all men because you found them guilty of sin; but why did you destroy Christ? Is it not very evident that you did so unjustly? Well then, through Him the whole world will be vindicated.'" [21]

Christ saved us in the way He did not only to manifest His justice and righteousness, but also to manifest His love. St. Isaac the Syrian writes: "God the Lord surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to death for our sake (cf. John 3:16). This was not, however, because He could not have redeemed us in another way, but so that His surpassing love, manifested hereby, might be a teacher unto us. And by the death of His only begotten Son He made us near to Himself. Yea, if He had had anything more precious, He would have given it to us, so that by it our race might be His own." [22]

4. The Consequences of Christ's Redemptive Work

Now, having looked at how Christ redeemed us through His death on the Cross, let us turn to the saving fruits of Christ's death. What does it mean for mankind to be ransomed from guilt, to be forgiven of sins? It means, in the words of St. John Damascene, that "the road back to the former blessedness [i.e., before the Fall] has been made smooth, and the gates of Paradise opened." [23] Through Christ's death, we can be forgiven and cleansed of sin so as to receive what we would otherwise not be worthy of receiving: the Grace of the Holy Spirit within ourselves, as Adam had it before the Fall. Moreover, we can go where we would not otherwise be worthy to go: Paradise and heaven. The first to receive this gift was one who was clearly unworthy, but who nevertheless believed in Christ and thus was redeemed through His death. This was the repentant thief on the Cross, to whom Christ said, Today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

The saving fruits of Christ's death were made available not only to those who lived after Him, but also to those who lived before Him; for during His three-day burial Jesus Christ harrowed hell and brought to Paradise those righteous ones who had lain in hades throughout the ages. "Christ's death," writes St. Symeon the New Theologian, "was an indispensable sacrifice also for the pious ones who died before His coming in the flesh." [24]

At His death, Christ broke down the barrier of sin. But there was one barrier left: death itself. This Christ broke down at His Resurrection. As in Adam all die, writes St. Paul, so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man according to his order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming (I Cor. 15:22-23). Through Christ's Resurrection, all mankind has been made subject to future resurrection: physical, bodily resurrection. Those who receive Christ's gift of salvation are resurrected unto eternal life,

as He says; while those who reject it are resurrected unto damnation (cf. John 5:29). Once again, this is because human nature is one. St. Paul affirms: For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15:21).

Christ's death and burial can never be separated from His Resurrection. His Resurrection was an inevitable consequence of His death, since, as it is said in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, "it was not possible for the Author of Life to be a victim of corruption." [25] With Christ's death and His Resurrection, all the consequences of the Fall are overcome: both spiritual death (the loss of the Grace of God) and physical death. What we sing in the Paschal hymn we mean quite literally: "Christ is Risen from the dead, trampling down death by death."

In Christ alone there is true life. He offers us eternal life: first of all true spiritual life by having His life-giving Grace abiding within us; secondly, eternal spiritual life in His Heavenly Kingdom; and thirdly, eternal physical life in our resurrected bodies.

Let us look at these three in order. First of all, what does it mean to receive the life-giving Grace of the Holy Spirit through Christ's redeeming death? St. Symeon answers this with a remarkable statement--that it is like receiving a new soul. He writes: "The souls of those who believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in His great and fearful Sacrifice [on the Cross] are resurrected by God in this present life; and a sign of this resurrection is the Grace of the Holy Spirit which He gives to the soul of every Christian, as if giving a new soul." [26]

In the Gospels, especially the Gospel of St. John, Christ makes several statements which reveal how His followers would be able to receive the Grace of the Holy Spirit by means of His death. In the temple Christ preached: He that believeth on Me ... out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. After quoting these words of Christ, the Apostle John explains: But this spake He of the Spirit, which they who believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:38-39).

St. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on this Gospel, explains further. When the Apostle John said Jesus was not yet glorified, he meant that Jesus had not yet been crucified. Christ was glorified in His sacrifice on the Cross, and through this He made man open to receive the Holy Spirit in his soul, in his inward being, so that the Grace would flow out of him like rivers of living water. [27]

Later, in His last talk to His disciples before His passion and death, Christ tells them: I will pray the Father and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth (John 14:16).

According to St. John Chrysostom, "Christ said this to show the time of the coming of the Spirit. For when He had purified them by His sacrifice, then the Holy Spirit would descend upon them. Yet why did He not come upon them while Jesus was still with them? Because the Sacrifice had not yet been offered up [that is, Christ had not yet died on the Cross]. But, when at length sin had been destroyed, and they themselves were being sent into danger and were preparing for the contests, it was necessary for the Comforter to come." [28]

A little later Christ says to His disciples in order to comfort them before His crucifixion and burial: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you (John 16:7).

"But why did He not come before Christ had departed?" St. John Chrysostom asks rhetorically. "Because He could not come, since the curse had not yet been lifted, sin had not yet been forgiven, but all men were still subject to the penalty for it. 'Therefore,' He said, 'that enmity must be destroyed and you must be reconciled to God, and then you will receive the gift.'" [29]

When Christ first appeared among His Apostles after His death and Resurrection, His first act was to breathe upon them and to say: Receive ye the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). He could say and do this at that point because He had purified them by His sacrifice on the Cross; He had loosed them from sin. And then, after He had ascended to heaven and seated our human nature on the right hand of the Father, Christ sent down the Holy Spirit on His Apostles at Pentecost, as He had promised.

Since that time, those who have been baptized in Christ's Church have received the Grace of God within themselves. We receive Christ's gift of redemption and eternal life through His Church, which is His Body. It is in the Church that Christ bestows on us the saving fruits of His death and Resurrection. St. Symeon the New Theologian explains this beautifully:

"One Person of the Holy Trinity, namely the Son and Word of God, having become incarnate, offered Himself in the flesh as a sacrifice to the Divinity of the Father, and of the Son Himself, and of the Holy Spirit, in order that the first transgression of Adam might be benevolently forgiven for the sake of this great and fearful work, that is, for the sake of this sacrifice of Christ, and in order that by its power there might be performed another new birth and re-creation of man in Holy Baptism, in which we also are cleansed by water mingled with the Holy Spirit. From that time people are baptized in water, are immersed in it and taken out from it three times, in the image of the three-day burial of the Lord, and after they die in it to this whole evil world, in the third bringing out from it they are already alive, as if resurrected from the dead, that is, their souls are brought to life and again receive the Grace of the Holy Spirit as Adam had it before the transgression. Then they are anointed with Holy Myrrh, and by means of it are anointed with Jesus Christ, and are fragrant in a way above nature. Having become in this way worthy of being associates of God, they taste His Flesh and drink His Blood, and by means of the sanctified bread and wine become of one Body and Blood with God Who was incarnate and offered Himself as a sacrifice." [30]

The aim of the Christian life, says St. Seraphim of Sarov, is to acquire the Grace of the Holy Spirit. [31] We receive the seed of that Grace within us at Baptism. And then, through our sacramental life in the Church, through a life of prayer and virtue, practicing the commandments of Christ, we are to cultivate and nurture this seed of inward baptismal Grace so as to acquire a greater measure of Grace. In being ever more filled with God's Grace or Energy, we grow ever more in the likeness of Christ. Then, after our death, Christ will recognize us as His own and will receive us into His Kingdom.

At the beginning of this talk I mentioned that Christians are given the potential of attaining to a state even higher than Adam's state before the Fall. Through Christ's incarnation, death and Resurrection, man can not only be restored to what Adam lost; now he can attain to what Adam was meant to attain. Man can be filled with God's Energy to such an extent as to be deified by Grace. Vladimir Lossky writes that "In breaking the tyranny of sin [through His work of redemption], our Savior opens to us anew the way of deification, which is the final end of man." [32]

St. Symeon the New Theologian, who experienced the Grace of deification, speaks of this as participation in the life of God Himself. "He Himself is discovered within me," writes St. Symeon, "resplendent inside my wretched heart, enlightening me from all sides with His immortal splendor, shining on all of my members

with His rays. Entirely intertwined with me, He embraces me entirely. He gives Himself totally to me, the unworthy one, and I am filled with His love and beauty. I am sated with pleasure and Divine tenderness. I share in the Light. I participate also in the glory. My face shines like that of my Beloved and all my members become bearers of the Light." [33]

What St. Symeon describes, as marvelous as it is, is only a foretaste of the future life in heaven that is promised to Christ's true followers. It is only the beginning of a progress that will never end. "Indeed," says St. Symeon, "over the ages the progress will be endless, for a cessation of this growing toward the end without ending would be nothing but a grasping at the ungraspable. The One on Whom no one can be sated would then become an object of satiety. By contrast, to be filled with Him and to be glorified in His Light will cause unfathomable progress." [34]

Furthermore, the glory that now exists among the saints and angels in heaven is only a foretaste of the glory that will be revealed at the General Resurrection, when all the saving fruits of Christ's incarnation, death and Resurrection are to be fully revealed. Adam, it will be remembered, was supposed to raise the first-created world closer to God, to make it more spiritual through his own spiritual ascent to God. Adam failed in his purpose, so the New Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, came to fulfill it. His redemptive work was already accomplished with His death and Resurrection. But the fruits of that work unfold over time. As Christians we have already tasted some of those fruits, but we are to know them in their fullness after the General Resurrection. For through Christ's Resurrection, not only will man be resurrected in a renewed, spiritual body: the entire creation will be renewed and become spiritual. As the book of the Apocalypse says, there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth (cf. Apoc. 21:1).

The Body of the resurrected Christ was incomparably more spiritual than the incorrupt body of Adam before the Fall. Christ's resurrected, spiritual Body was like the spiritual body that Adam was supposed to attain by ascending to God in Paradise. Likewise, the New Heaven and the New Earth will be incomparably more spiritual than the incorrupt creation before the Fall. Through Christ the New Adam, the renewed creation will be what it would have been if the first Adam had raised it to God.

In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul writes of the future age of the renewed creation which will come into being after the General Resurrection:

I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God [that is, us]. For the creation was made subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him [Adam] who subjected it [to futility] in hope [that is, in hope of the General Resurrection]. Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only the creation, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:18-23).

We can experience the redemption of our souls even now. But what exactly will the redemption of our body mean--that redemption which was made possible through Christ's Resurrection? We can find no better description of this than in the words of St. Symeon, who undoubtedly beheld something of this future age in prophetic Divine vision. St. Symeon writes:

"You should know likewise what is to be the glory and the brightly shining state of the creation in the future age. For when it will be renewed, it will not again be the same as it was when it was created in the

beginning. But it will be such as, according to the word of the divine Paul, our body will also be. Concerning our body the Apostle says: It is sown in a natural body, but is raised a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:44) and unchanging, such as was the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, after the Resurrection. In the same way also the whole creation, according to the commandment of God, is to be, after the General Resurrection, not such as it was created, material and sensuous, but it is to be re-created and to become a certain immaterial and spiritual dwelling, surpassing every sense, as the Apostle says of us, We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15:51). Thus also the whole creation, after it shall burn up in the Divine fire, is to be changed.

"The heaven will become incomparably more brilliant and bright than it appears now; it will become completely new. The earth will receive a new, unutterable beauty, being clothed in many-formed, unfading flowers, bright and spiritual. The whole world will become more perfect than any word can describe. Having become spiritual and divine, it will become united with the noetic world; it will become a certain mental Paradise, a heavenly Jerusalem, the inalienable inheritance of the sons of God. Such an earth has not been inherited as yet by a single man; we are all strangers and foreigners. But when the earthly will be united with the heavenly, then also the righteous will inherit that already renewed earth whose inheritors are to be those meek ones who are blessed by the Lord." [35]

All this, the glory of the future age, has been made possible by Christ's death and Resurrection. Christ, being both God and man, already dwells in this glory, being in heaven in His glorified, resurrected body. But we have another who already partakes of the glory that is to come after the General Resurrection. This is the Most Holy Mother of God. In her we see all the fruits of Christ's work of redemption, for not only has she been deified in soul, she has been resurrected by Christ in a spiritual body like His own. She has already been fully glorified by God, with the glory that the saints will know only after the General Resurrection. Vladimir Lossky writes that the Mother of God "is the perfection of the Church already realized in a human person fully united to God, beyond the Resurrection and the Judgment. Like her Son, she was raised from the dead and borne up to heaven--the first human hypostasis in whom was fulfilled the final end for which the world was created." [36] She has already become that which the first-created man and woman were supposed to become. She has been raised higher than the angels, and become "more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim." She is the crown of creation, the testament of the glory of the future age which will come into being through Christ's redemptive work. Again Vladimir Lossky writes: "In the two perfect persons--the Divine person of Christ and the human person of the Mother of God--is contained the mystery of the Church." [37]

This, then, is the whole of what Christ accomplished through His incarnation, death and Resurrection. In the words of St. Gregory the Theologian: "We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him, because we were put to death with Him; we were glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him." [38]

Through the totality of Christ's work of redemption, man is spiritually united with God and deified, and man's body and the entire creation are to be renewed as a spiritual and divine dwelling place. Truly, as we see affirmed over and over again in the writings of the Fathers: "God became man so that man might become god." [39]

From The Orthodox Word (No. 235, March-April, 2004), pp. 57-77.

Hieromonk Damascene (Christensen)

4/29/2016

1 Cf. Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), pp. 156-57, 443-45.

2 Cf. St. John Damascene, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 37 (1958), pp. 232-35; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), p. 118; and Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 171, 436-40.

3 Cf. St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition*, p. 235; and Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 126.

4 Cf. Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, pp. 157, 208-12, 351, 413-14, 421, 591-92.

5 Cf. St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The First-Created Man* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994), pp. 90, 102-103.

6 Cf. St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 41, in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 156-60; and Lossky, pp. 109-111.

7 Cf. St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition*, p. 267: "Man was stripped of Grace and deprived of that familiarity which he had enjoyed with God."

8 Cf. St. Gregory Palamas, "To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia," in *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 296.

9 Cf. St. John Damascene, *Exact Exposition*, p. 267.

10 Cf. *The Homilies of St. Gregory Palamas*, vol. 1 (South Canaan, Penn., 2002), pp. 180, 184, 196-97.

11 Cf. I Cor. 3:7-13; and *The Philokalia*, vol. 3 (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 347-48.

12 Cf. Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 133.

13 Cf. St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), pp. 105-106.

14 *Homilies of St. Gregory Palamas*, p. 197.

15 Cf. Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), p. 111.

16 *Homilies of St. Gregory Palamas*, pp. 200-201.

17 St. Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), p. 34 (emphasis added).

18 St. Symeon the New Theologian, *First-Created Man*, pp. 47-48.

19 St. Gregory the Theologian, "The Second Oration on Holy Pascha" (Oration 45:22) (emphasis added). In Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 36 (Paris, 1865), p. 653. Quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, p. 153.

20 Cf. Homilies of St. Gregory Palamas, pp. 179-80.

21 St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, Homilies 48-88, in The Fathers of the Church, vol. 41 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), p. 232.

22 The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), pp. 345-46.

23 St. John Damascene, Exact Exposition, p. 350.

24 St. Symeon the New Theologian, First-Created Man, p. 73.

25 Priest's prayer before the words of institution during the Anaphora. Translation by St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, South Canaan, Penn., 1984.

26 St. Symeon the New Theologian, First-Created Man, p. 48.

27 Cf. St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on St. John, Homilies 48-88, p. 38.

28 Ibid., p. 302.

29 Ibid., p. 345.

30 St. Symeon the New Theologian, First-Created Man, pp. 46-47.

31 Cf. Little Russian Philokalia, vol. 1: St. Seraphim of Sarov (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996), p. 79.

32 Lossky, Mystical Theology, p. 134.

33 St. Symeon the New Theologian, The Divine Hymns (Hymn 16:23-33). Quoted in Archbishop Basil Krivocheine, In the Light of Christ (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), p. 365.

34 Ibid. (Hymn 1:180-84). Quoted in Krivocheine, p. 386.

35 St. Symeon the New Theologian, First-Created Man, pp. 103-105.

36 Lossky, Mystical Theology, pp. 193-94.

37 Ibid., p. 195.

38 St. Gregory the Theologian, "The Second Oration on Holy Pascha." In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 433.

39 St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Athanasius the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, etc. Cf. Lossky, Mystical Theology, p. 134.

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