

AND HIS REPOSE SHALL BE GLORIOUS

Isaiah 11:10 in the Septuagint version (the only version of the Old Testament that our church recognizes) tells us: “And His repose shall be glorious.” Saint Cyril, in his *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* tells us that this is a prophesy about our Lord’s repose or death, which we are told shall be “glorious.” How can His death be glorious? Death on the Cross is considered to be the most shameful death, for the Bible tells us in Galatians 3:13: “Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree.” So, how can the Lord’s death on the Cross be glorious?

In order to understand this mystery, we have to go back to the creation, the fall, the incarnation, and finally come to the death on the cross.

THE CREATION:

Man was created with a body and a rational soul. The body was created mortal but the soul was created immortal and aware of its immortality like St. Athanasius tells us in his book *Against the Heathen* section 33. But the Bible as well as the Liturgy, tell us that “man was created in incorruption,” and that “death came into the world through the envy of the devil.” What does that mean? Corruption means decay, the process that comes from aging and diseases and that ultimately leads to death, So although man’s body was mortal, yet because of its incorruption it was capable of immortality. And, indeed, had man abided in obedience to God he would have been granted immortality by God.

Man was also created impassible as the fathers tell us. Impassible means not susceptible to suffering. “Pass” is the root of passion which means suffering. The passion of Christ means the suffering of Christ. This impassibility was both of the body, meaning that Adam’s body was not susceptible to pain, and of the soul, which means that Adam’s soul could not feel the unpleasant emotions like fear, anguish, sorrow and anxiety.

Man was also created sinless, with no knowledge of good and evil.

THE FALL:

The fall changed all of this. Man who was potentially capable of immortality lost this capability, since he brought unto himself the judgement of death by disobeying God. He also lost his incorruption and became corruptible, susceptible to gradual decay by aging and disease and ultimately dying. Death for the body means its separation from the soul, its return to earth, from whence it was created, where it will dissolve and be come earth once again. But what about the soul? When Adam sinned both his soul and his body sinned, so what was the punishment of the soul? Saint Athanasius tells us in his *First Book Against Apollinaris* section 14, that “God gave judgement in a two fold form, saying to the body, earth you are and to earth you shall depart, and so, the Lord having pronounced the sentence, corruption receives the body, but to the soul, you shall die the death.” So what is the death of the soul? It is being sent into Hades (Hell) for eternal damnation. Hades is a dark prison in which the souls are bound as if in fetters (chains). We know this from the book of Psalms. The morning Psalm of the first Sunday of Kiak tells us: “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the earth: To hear the groaning of those in fetters” Those “groaning in fetters” or chains are the souls of Adam and

all his children that were detained in Hades.

Through the fall, man also lost his impassibility or immunity from suffering both in body and in soul, so now he could feel bodily pain and unpleasant emotions. Now, Eve can feel the pains of birth-giving as a direct result of her disobedience. Both Adam and Eve experienced fear and shame when they heard the voice of the Lord in the Garden: “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Gen 3:10)

Man also lost his sinlessness and became sinful, that means subject to sinning, like St Cyril tells us in his *Commentary On Romans*: “After (Adam) fell into sin ... impure lusts invaded the nature of his flesh, ... our nature contracted the disease of sin because of the disobedience of one man, that is Adam, and thus many became sinners.”

Saint Athanasius tells us the same thing in his *First Book Against Apollinaris* section 15: “And thus from disobedience to God’s commandment, man became receptive of the seed sown by the enemy, and from thenceforward sin was active in man’s nature.” Saint Athanasius here is explaining for us the parable of our Lord in Matt 13:24-25 “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.” The man who sowed good seeds is the Lord and the good seed is the word of God, and the enemy is Satan who plants seeds of evil in man’s soul so that thorns and weeds grow and choke the word of God preventing it from bringing good fruits.

THE INCARNATION; GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION:

St. Athanasius tells us in his book *On the Incarnation of the Word*: section 9: “For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death.... And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it over to death instead of all.” This is where the incarnation comes to the picture.

So, in the fullness of time and according to God’s “economy” or plan of salvation, the Word comes to the Virgin’s womb where he creates for himself a human body, which he instantly makes one with his divinity, so that he may present this human body to die instead of us all. This body was created complete with a human rational soul.

The body that the word created was exactly like ours, it was corruptible, that means capable of dying, because this was the plan of salvation as we shall see. It was also passible that is susceptible to pain both in the body and in the soul. The Lord’s body felt all the pain of the nails and the thorns and the spear, just like Adam would have felt them. The Lord’s soul also felt the emotional pain of the Cross, for in John 12:27, The Lord tells us: “Now is my soul troubled.” And again in Matt 26:38: “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” St. Athanasius tells us that the Word willed that His soul would feel the pain of the Cross like anyone of us, because that too was required for our salvation.

But the soul of Christ was sinless, just like Adam’s soul when he was created. Satan tempted our Lord but could not cause him to sin. In Heb 4:15 we are told that Christ “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” That means that Satan tried to sow the seeds

of evil in Christ's human soul but they produced no tares, no weeds or thorns, no sins. Saint Cyril tells us in his *Commentary On Isaiah*, that this was prophesied in Isaiah 7:15 (Septuagint) "For before the child shall know good and evil, he will refuse the evil, and choose the good"

Saint Athanasius explains to us an important point: when Satan tempted our Lord, "he was not contending with the Godhead" he was fighting the human soul of Christ, renewed into the sinlessness in which Adam was created. But unlike Adam who could not keep his God given sinlessness and fell into sin at the first temptation, Christ, the second Adam kept his sinlessness in spite of the many temptations he was subjected to. By remaining sinless he gave our fallen human nature victory over sin, and proved to us that even in our frail humanity we too can prevail against the assaults of Satan.

THE DEATH ON THE CROSS:

Now we come to Christ's death or repose. St. Athanasius tells us, again in his *Second Book Against Apollinaris*: that "in order to save the whole man, Christ gave His body instead of our bodies and he gave His soul instead of our souls." So, on the Cross when Christ is said to have given up the Ghost, his human soul was separated from His human body but His divinity was not separated neither from His soul nor from his body. The body united to the divinity was buried in the sepulchre, and that was how he gave his body instead of our bodies. But to give His soul instead of our souls, His soul had to go down to Hades where all the souls of those who died went, and that is where His human soul united to his Godhead went after it was separated from the body.

Satan laid claim against all the souls that died before Christ. He saw the tares that he sowed within them and claimed these souls as his own. So, when Christ's soul descended into Hades, Satan came to meet it thinking that it was just another fallen soul that belonged to him. St. Athanasius tells us that, had Satan known that this soul was united to the Godhead he would have not dared to approach it, but he could not discern the Godhead because the Godhead was "veiled with the human soul."

But then Satan was thrown into utter confusion, for when he looked at this soul, he could not find any tares. He had been sowing the seeds of evil into this soul (through his temptations) but to his surprise that soul was sinless. St. Athanasius tells us that this is what the Lord meant when he said in John 14:30, "the prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me." Satan, the prince of this world came to the soul of Jesus but found nothing that belonged to him in that soul. That is why Satan could lay no claim whatsoever on the Lord's soul. He could not detain it in Hades, nor put fetters or chains around it like he did to the soul of Adam and all his children.

Our Lord explained for us His descent into hades by a parable, in Mark 3:27 "No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house." This is exactly what the Lord did, he entered into the strong man's house, for Satan is the strong man in the parable, and Hades is his house, and instead of Satan binding Him in Hades, He bound Satan for a thousand years and spoiled his goods. By remaining sinless even while tempted in everything like us, He proved himself stronger than Satan, the strong man, and thus was able to bind the strong man.

What are these goods that Christ spoiled or took away from Satan? They are the souls that Satan had bound in Hades for thousands of years. We can say that “the life savings of Satan” were confiscated by the Lord when he gave up the ghost on the Cross! Of course not all the souls detained in Hades were taken by the Lord, only those who were pleasing to the Lord either according to the law of Moses or according to the natural law that God put in man. Christ “broke the gates of brass and cut asunder the bars of iron and brought out his elect with joy and rejoicing. He lifted them up with him”, as we say in the Doxology of the Resurrection.

There is a beautiful Fraction Prayer for the Resurrection that we seldom use, that tells us the rest of the story: “This is He who descended into Hades, abolished the power of death, led captivity captive and gave honours to men. He lifted His saints up with Him and gave them as a gift to His Father.” So, those who were in the captivity of Satan became captives of Christ, He took them from Hades into heaven and gave them as a gift to His Father. He told His Father: “This is our creation which we created in our image and likeness, and which was stolen by Satan. I was incarnate, became man, and died to save them. I am giving them to you as a gift, which I purchased with my own blood that was shed on the cross. A gift, that I purchased by the nails that cut through my hands, and the thorns that penetrated my head, ... by the pain I endured in my body and the anguish I endured in my soul, ... by my glorious repose.”

After this there was one more thing to do; the soul of Christ came down from heaven, to unite itself to the body in the sepulchre in the glorious Resurrection. It was then that “the corruptible put on incorruption,” and “the mortal put on immortality,” and “Death was swallowed up in victory.” Now we can all say “O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?”

In the Resurrection, the body of Christ that the Word created for himself corruptible and mortal and passible became incorruptible and immortal and impassible. No more subject to decay, no more subject to death and no more subject to pain or sorrow or groaning.

But there is more! Saint Cyril tells us that the resurrected body of our Lord became life giving! Not only is it immortal but it can also give immortality. And this life giving body is laid for us on the altar every day.

St. Cyril tells us that the body of Christ which we eat in the Eucharist is like the “leaven.” which the Lord Jesus spoke of in this parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” (Matt 13:33) The life giving body of Christ that we partake of, which is the same life giving body that rose from the dead becomes in us a “leaven of immortality” that makes the whole of our body immortal.

This is how the Lord saved us by His glorious repose; by giving His soul instead of our souls, and giving His body instead of our bodies. His soul which he gave instead of our souls gave us victory over Hades and victory over sin. And his body which he gave instead of our bodies, gave us victory over the grave and victory over death. Now we can shout with Isaiah: And His repose is indeed glorious! And if we remain united to his resurrected and life giving body in the Eucharist, then we too can live forever, because His glorious repose will be our glorious repose and his glorious Resurrection will be our glorious resurrection. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

