

2012 Post Paschal Sundays

Thomas Sunday (2012)

Posted on [April 22, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



“The Church refers to the hesitant apostle as ‘Doubting Thomas,’ the unbeliever, and it is significant that it commemorates him specifically the first week after Pascha, calling it ‘Thomas Sunday’. For of course, it reminds us not only about Thomas, but about each person, about humanity. My Lord, what a desert of fear, of mindlessness, and of suffering has mankind produced with all of its progress and all of its synthetic happiness! It has reached the moon, it has overcome distances, has conquered nature, yet it seems that no words of Holy Scripture so well express the state of the world as ‘the whole creation has been

groaning in travail’ (Rom 8:22). It truly groans and suffers, and in the midst of the suffering resounds that proud and senseless and fearful declaration: ‘If I do not see, I will not believe.’ But Christ had pity on Thomas and came to him and said: ‘Put our finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing’ (Jn 20:27). And Thomas fell before him on his knees and exclaimed: ‘My Lord and my God!’ (Jn 20:28). It was the end of his pride, his self-assurance, his self-satisfaction: I am not gullible like all of you, you can’t fool me. He yielded, he believed, he gave himself – and in that instant he achieved that freedom, that happiness and joy, those very things for which he refused simply to believe, expecting proofs.” (Alexander Schmemmann, [O Death Where is Thy Sting?](#), pgs. 67-69)

The Myrrhbearing Women, Bearing Hope

Posted on [April 16, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

Before the rising of the sun,



*the ointment-bearing women
hastened to anoint the sun
that had disappeared for a while
into the darkness of the tomb,
though it existed before
the sun itself came into being.*



*These holy women were seeking him
as one would seek the very light of day,
and, as they walked along, they spoke of
what they were about to do:
Come, let us hurry! Let us anoint the
very source of life as he lies in the grave,*

that very one who raised up Adam.



Yes, let us hurry!

We shall bring him a gift of myrrh

and adore him

as once the wise men did,

for, as then he lay wrapped in swaddling clothes,

he now lies wrapped in a burial shroud.



Then, we shall tearfully entreat him:

Rise up, master,

for you alone provide

the grace of resurrection for the fallen!

(Ikos of Paschal Matins, New Skete Monastery)



Relics and the Resurrection

Posted on [April 24, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



“... Every altar in our churches bears a holy fragment – bit of bone, most often – as testament to the uncommon and genuine honor in which we hold the body – even shattered bits of it, even when its habitant has, for all appearances, gone hence. Each mute relic

serves as token both of death and of life’s appalling

ubiquity – even there. It helps to bear in mind



*the curious and irreparable harm the Crucified
inflicted upon the nether realm when graved
He filled it with Himself, and in so doing, burst
its meager hold and burst its hold on us – all
of which has made the memory of death lately
less grim. Gehenna is empty, and tenders*

these days an empty threat. Remember that.”

(Scott Cairns, [Philokalia: New & Selected Poems](#), pg. 41)

The Acts of the Apostles



Posted on [April 26, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

During the weeks following Pascha, we read liturgically in the Orthodox Church from the Acts of the Apostles. [St. Justin Martyr](#) (d. ca 165AD) offers a brief synopsis of ACTS and of the early church:

“For from Jerusalem there went out into the world, men, twelve in number, and these illiterate, of no talent in speaking, but by the power of God, they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach too all the word of God. And we who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also,

that we may not lie nor deceive our examiners, willing die confessing Christ.” (St. Justin Martyr in [For the Peace from Above: An Orthodox Resource Book on War, Peace, and Nationalism](#) edited by Fr. Hildo Bos, pg. 102)

Christ as Hermeneutic: Moses Wrote of Me

Posted on April 27, 2012 by Fr. Ted



A theme regarding the interpretation of Scripture which I have frequently mentioned is that for Christians, Christ is the [hermeneutic](#) or interpretive key for understanding the Old Testament texts. Unlike what some modern Christians like to claim, that literalism is the principle by which we read the Old Testament, the New Testament itself gives us the clue for reading the Old Testament. We find this interpretive principle in John’s Gospel, Chapter 5. It is an idea I have presented in many blogs as the Orthodox principle for reading the Old Testament. (see for example my blogs: [Jesus the Key to Understanding Torah](#), [Christ is the Key to Reading](#)

[Scripture](#), [Christ is the Key to Open the Scriptural Treasury](#), [Reading the Old Testament with Jesus](#), [Reading the Old Testament to Reveal the Truth](#)). Today, one of the

scheduled Scripture Lessons is John 5:30-6:2. It is the very passage in which Jesus offers a hermeneutic for reading the Scriptures. Jesus is in a dialog or debate with His fellow Jews discussing the messiah, who Jesus is and the purpose of the Scriptures.

Jesus says (the emphasis is mine and is not in the original text):

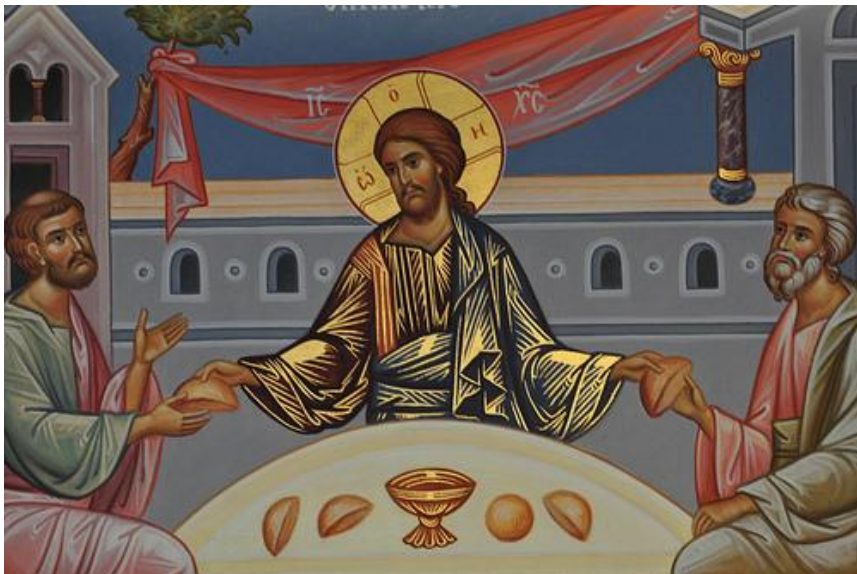
*“And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. **You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.** I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; . . . Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. If you believed **Moses**, you would believe me, for he **wrote of me**. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”* (John 5:37-47)

Jesus makes a very bold claim that Moses wrote about Him (Jesus). Moses is credited with having written Torah, the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible. Jesus says

Moses was writing about Him (Jesus)! To read the Genesis text literally to discover history and science is to misread and misunderstand the text. We read Genesis and all of Torah and the entirety of the Old Testament in order to come to faith in Christ.

St. Luke in his Gospel offers a very similar lesson as Jesus explains to the two disciples walking to Emmaus the prophecy of and the purpose of His (the Messiah's) own suffering, death and resurrection:

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)



Jesus says according to St. John that the very way the texts of Moses are to be read is in and through Him. It is Moses, not Jesus, who will judge whether or not the Jews (and all of us) have been faithful in reading and obeying Scriptures. Jesus says if you really believe Moses,

if you read his writings with faith and understanding, then you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah. If you read Moses incorrectly – without faith – you won't understand what he was purposefully saying and so you won't believe Jesus either.

The real debate according to Jesus is not whether the Genesis creation story is literally true or not. The real debate is whether you read Moses with faith and recognize that Moses was writing a prophecy about the Messiah. If we understand that even Genesis is about Jesus, we will rightly understand its importance in our lives. For Jesus believing Moses' writings means recognizing that they are written about Jesus, the Messiah.



Jesus asks His fellow Jews, “*if you do not believe Moses’ writings, how will you believe my words?*” Jesus is saying there is a right way to read Moses and the Torah. That way requires the understanding that Moses wrote about Jesus the Messiah. This way of reading Torah is very much in line with the

many competing views of the proper way to read Scripture that existed among Jews in Jesus’ day. Jesus offers a particular interpretation of Moses, a particular hermeneutic. If you believe what Moses wrote you will agree with what Jesus teaches. Only if you disbelieve Moses will you not believe in Jesus as Christ.

Post Paschal Sundays (PDFs)

Posted on [April 27, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



I’ve assembled into single documents the blogs that I’ve posted each year concerning the Sundays after Pascha: St. Thomas Sunday, the Myrrhbearing Women, the Paralytic, the Samaritan Woman, the Man born Blind, and the Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council. Links to the PDF for each year are listed below. (2008 was the year I began blogging, it is interesting to me how I changed my blogs through the years as I understood the medium – started with just reproducing texts, slowly added links and photos with less text).

[2008 Post Paschal Sundays](#)

[2009 Post Paschal Sundays](#)

[2010 Post Paschal Sundays](#)

[2011 Post Paschal Sundays](#)

Christ is risen! Hell and all Hells are Conquered!

Posted on [May 3, 2012](#) by Fr. Ted



“For if indeed there were a God whose true nature – whose justice of sovereignty – were revealed in the death of a child or the derelictions of a soul or a predestined hell, then it would be no great transgression to think of him as a kind of malevolent or contemptible demiurge, and to hate him, and to deny him worship, and to seek a better God than he. But Christ has overthrown all those principalities that rule without justice and in defiance of charity, and has cast out the god of this world; and so we are free (even now, in this mortal body) from slavery to arbitrary power, from fear of hell’s dominion, and from

any superstitious subservience to fate.” (David Bentley Hart, [The Doors of the Sea](#), pgs. 91-92)

Bethzatha and Baptism

Posted on [May 6, 2012](#) by Fr. Ted

John 5:1-15

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Bethzatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?”



“The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet.” But he answered them, “The man who healed me said to me, “Take up your pallet, and walk.” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, “Take up your pallet, and walk?”” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had

withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.



St. John Chrysostom writes about the Paralytic being healed, and refers to the healing of soul that takes place at baptism. Like the paralytic we too may have long been suffering from the effects of our sin and had no one to help us. No matter the sin or how long its effects had controlled our lives, in Christ our soul is healed and forgiven. God who created the world out of nothing is able to restore a soul reduced to ashes. At baptism we are lowered into those healing waters, over which we have prayed and upon which God has bestowed His Holy Spirit, transforming them into the waters

of the Jordan in which Christ was baptized and upon which He left His divine grace.



"Now, an angel came down and stirred the water, and put the power of healing in it, in order that the Jews might learn that the Lord of angels is much more able to heal the diseases of the soul. However, just as here it was not merely the nature of the water that healed (if it were, surely this healing would have occurred every time), but water supplemented by the power of the angel, so in our case: it is not merely the water that acts, but, when it has received the grace of the Spirit, then it frees us from every sin. Around this pool 'were lying a great multitude of the sick, blind, lame, and those with shriveled limbs, waiting for the moving of the water.' At that time, however,

sickness was an impediment to him who wished to be healed; now, on the contrary, each one is capable of approaching of himself. It is not an angel who now stirs the water, but the Lord of the angels who does everything. And it is not possible for the sick man to say: 'I have no one'; he cannot say: 'While I am coming to go down,

another steps down before me.' But, even if the whole world should come, grace is not used up, nor is the power diminished; it remains the same, now, still what it was before. And just as sunbeams give light every day and do not dwindle in size, nor does their light become less because of its lavish spending, so it is much more true that the power of the Spirit is not lessened by the number of those who receive its benefit." (St. John Chrysostom, [Homilies on St. John 1-47](#), pgs. 352-352)

Sunday of the Paralytic (2012)

Posted on [May 6, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

John 5:1-15



After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Bethzatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet." But he answered them, "The man who healed me said to me, "Take up your pallet, and walk." They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, "Take up your pallet, and walk?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

In this Gospel Lesson, we are given by our Lord Jesus an example of how to deal with the problems of the world – one at a time. We are supposed to imitate Christ, but most of us would say but we are not gifted to heal people like He did. True enough, but we can read this Gospel lesson and understand it offers some very concrete guidance in

dealing with problems. Jesus walks by the Sheep Gate, right into a place which is known to be full of problems – multitudes of “invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed.” Obviously since so many of the sick found their way there, the place was well known in its day. So I would think Jesus went there intentionally. He didn’t avoid a place full of problems,



sickness, suffering, stench and death. We can imitate Christ in also not making ourselves blind to the suffering of others in the world. We can go to places where people are impoverished and hungry and ill and in need of relief of all kinds rather than hiding in our suburbs. We ought not pretend they don’t exist if we don’t see them.

And then Christ sets an example we all can follow. He does not heal everyone there, nor even most, nor even a few. He heals but **one person**. His miraculous behavior is not inimitable. He sets an example for us to follow. We need only help one person, like Christ did.

There are a multitude of needs and problems in the world. We also don’t have to go very far- there are individuals in our towns, in our neighborhoods, in our families and in our homes who are in serious need of help. It might be within our power to help them on the road to recovery, to health, to repentance, to the Kingdom of God. We have to open our eyes to see, and then be willing to use the gifts and resources given to us to help these others. Christ does His good deed anonymously. This too we can imitate. Notice the man he healed didn’t even know Jesus’ name. He doesn’t know where Jesus is or how to find him. Christ helps the man and then disappears. We certainly can imitate Christ in this way of well-doing. We don’t need immediate rewards and recognition for the good deeds we do. We need only imitate Christ our Lord.

The example Christ sets in this Gospel lesson is something we can follow. We can be Christ-like, Christian, in helping one other person in a sea of suffering. We don’t have to end world poverty, we need only help feed one person a meal.

The Crucifixion of Hell

Posted on May 7, 2012 by Fr. Ted



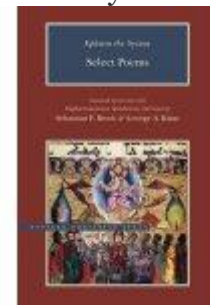
The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is praised in Orthodox hymns as the death of death and the destruction of the Hell/Hades, the place which held Death's captives.

The Orthodox hymns of the Paschal season often anthropomorphize Death, Hell and Sin, treating them as personal enemies of God which are defeated by Christ through His death and resurrection.

Consider two hymns from Matins Canticle 7, Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women:

*Take courage, earthborn, for hell is dead!
Christ has hung it upon the Cross!
He has cast down the armor of hell,
He has captured it and stripped it bare.
Hell lies lifeless and dead.*

The hymn above has Christ performing a miraculous switch with Hell – for in a complete “substitutionary” death, Christ in His own crucifixion actually nails Hell to the cross and crucifies it! Hell was envisioned with armor – protected from any attack since no one was known to escape its grip. Christ captures Hell which held Death's captives, and then slays Hell. Thus the place of the dead is defeated. [St. Ephrem the Syrian in his poetry calls Christ the "hunter" of Satan. (see [EPHREM THE SYRIAN SELECT POEMS](#), p 51). Satan in his turn recognizes that Christ is hunting him down and so hunts the Hunter (the slaughter of the Holy Innocents by Herod after Christ's birth is Satan's first stab at slaying his pursuer). Of course, little does Satan understand that in achieving his murderous goal - the death of Christ - he is assuring his own destruction. Death is Satan's tool and friend, Christ is going to use Death's insatiable appetite to destroy Death and simultaneously to defeat Satan.]



*The Lord is risen, capturing the enemy.
He has freed the prisoners.
Leading the first formed Adam out, together with all mankind,
He restores him as the merciful God and Lover of mankind!*



Hell, personified is God's enemy. Christ, God's chosen and suffering servant, through His death on the cross goes to Hell but is not captured and captivated by it. Instead Christ takes the Jailor Death prisoner and frees **all** of Hell's captives. As in many Orthodox hymns and Patristic writers, Christ's descent into Hell is a triumphal victory over it, and **all** those who have died including the original sinner Adam are liberated from death's prison. The salvation of Christ is not limited to the righteous who had died, but is universal and extends to all who died becoming prisoners of Death.

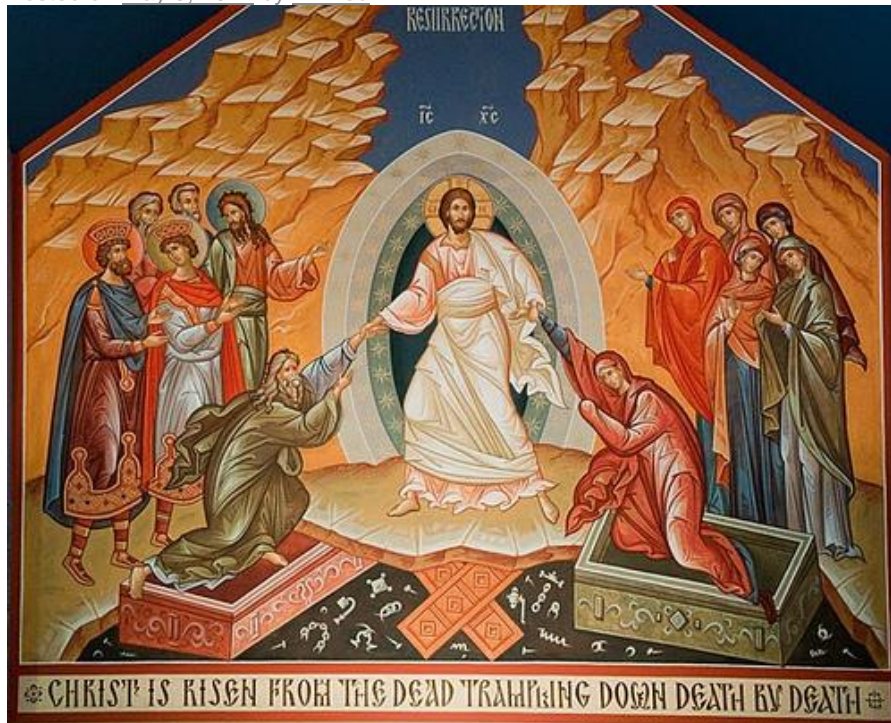
[Interestingly, many Western Patristic writers believed Christ saved from Hades only the righteous saints of the Old Testament, but not all the dead. They seem to hold to some version of a "predestined" idea that justice demands that sinners remain in Hades.

On the other hand, the 2nd Century heresiarch Marcion held a particular interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 in which only the sinners of the Old Testament were saved by Christ's descent into Hades - the Old Testament saints continued to rely on their own keeping the law/works righteousness and thus rejected Christ's offer. For Marcion pictures Cain and other sinners flocking to Christ gleeful for the liberation from the hellish prison, while Noah and the Old Testament righteous preferred to wait in Hades until their righteousness was recognized by God - they assumed Christ's offer was some kind of trick to draw them away from Torah (See Robert Grant's [IRENÆUS OF LYONS](#), Chapter 2).]

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

Christ's Descent Reconstitutes Hades

Posted on May 9, 2012 by Fr. Ted



“From Adam until the time of Christ, Hades was the place where the devil kept all who had died, and there was no way out. With Christ’s victory and the despoiling of Hades, this function – is no longer operative. Hades now becomes simply and solely and solely the place of final punishment. Therefore, Hades is not simply abolished by Christ’s descent, but rather reconstituted; it ceases to be the place of Satan’s dominion over all the dead and becomes instead the place under Christ’s lordship where those who refuse to believe in him reach their final destiny. Curiously, Cyril continues to call this place, ‘Hades’, making no distinction in the name, even though the function of the place has changed. In a sense, ‘Hades’ has changed ownership (and purpose) by virtue of Christ’s glorious victory over death.” (Daniel Keating, “Christ’s Despoiling of Hades: According to Cyril of Alexandria,” [St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly](#), pg. 260)

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

(Psalm 139:7-10)

The Risen Christ Triumphs Over Evil

Posted on [May 11, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



“We do not see how the purposes of love can be reconciled with the purposelessness of evil, but we do see that the human being who embodies the pattern of a loving God is both submerged in the destructiveness of evil and emerges from it as a distinctive, loving and personal activity. The Logos of the cosmos is not a mythological theory but a crucified man. The hope of personal sense and fulfillment lies neither in ignoring evil nor in explaining evil but in the fact that Jesus Christ endured evil and emerged from evil.”

(D. Jenkins in [The Faith of a Physicist](#) by John Polkinghorne, pg. 121)

St. Paul’s Gospel of the Resurrection

Posted on [May 12, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



RESURRECTION AS NEW CREATION

“The second element follows the first: Paul perceives the resurrection of Jesus as something more than the validation of a Jewish Messiah in the traditional sense of a restorer of the people. The resurrection of Jesus is more than a historical event like the exodus. It is an eschatological event that begins a new age of humanity. Indeed, the resurrection is best understood as new creation: ‘If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, everything is new’ (2 Cor 5:17).”

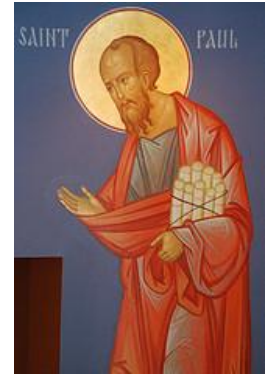
(Luke Timothy Johnson in [The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul](#), p 202)

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

“This is one of the reasons bodily resurrection-both Christ’s and ours-is so important to Paul. It is a fundamental and non-negotiable building block of his ethic. It has been said that without the resurrection, Christianity collapses. For Paul, that is certainly true, but it is especially true for his view of how believers ought to live. The body is the

means by which we encounter others and serve God. The believer's new life in the body consists of the offering of one's body and its various 'members' to God as a spiritual sacrifice, like a priest to a deity (Rom 6:11-13). It is because the body was created by God, has been 'purchased' by God in the act of redemption (Christ's cross), and will one day be resurrected by God that Paul can pronounce every bodily deed as a matter of grave spiritual significance (1 Cor 6:12-20)."

(Michael J. Gorman, [Reading Paul](#), pp 106-107)



Samaritan Woman (2012)

Posted on [May 13, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



John 4:5-42

The Lord came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and

he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman

answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."



St. John Chrysostom wrote about the Gospel Lesson of the Samaritan woman:



“Yesterday’s theme of the Samaritan woman gave us adequate instruction in the Lord’s ineffable longsuffering and surpassing concern for her, as well as her gratitude. You saw how she came to draw material water but in fact drew from the divine streams coming from an invisible spring, and thus went off home, fulfilling the word of the Lord. ‘The water that I shall give will become a spring of water in him gushing forth to life everlasting.’ Once she had drunk her fill of that divine and spiritual spring, remember, she did not keep the waters to herself but overflowed, so to say, and poured out on the inhabitants of

the town as well the grace of the gift given her; the woman, the Samaritan, the foreigner, immediately turned preacher. You saw how important gratitude of soul is, you saw the Lord’s loving kindness in not scorning anyone but immediately directing his grace to anyone, be it woman or pauper – wherever at all he finds a spirit watchful and alive. Accordingly, I beseech you, let us also imitate this woman and receive the teachings of the Spirit with close attention.” ([The Fathers of the Church: St. John Chrysostom Homilies on Genesis 19-45](#), pg. 455)

Well Water



Posted on [May 22, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

The [Gospel lesson about the Samaritan woman](#), whose name we know from tradition is Photini, at the well offers to us a good example of the multiple levels and layers at which Scripture can present an issue.

Literally you have a Jewish man and Samaritan woman conversing, which would have been socially unusual if not completely socially unacceptable. One is thirsty, the other has the means to draw water from the well. But the conversation in the story

quickly reveals that though they begin talking about the well, water and thirst,

these are all also metaphors for the spiritual life. Jews and Samaritans shared the texts of the Torah, though perhaps in slightly different versions with differing interpretations. So Jesus and the Samaritan woman begin discussing “tradition” and how their respective groups understand even the Patriarch Jacob. And in literature of that day the Torah was oft referred to as a deep well from which believers draw refreshing waters. So there is metaphorical imagery abounding in this Gospel lesson as Jesus and the Samaritan woman engage in a conversation whose underlying question is “what are we talking about here? - Well, Torah, tradition, customs, truth, godliness? The woman becomes convinced Jesus is the messiah, which is another of the many layers of conversation in the story. Yet for both Jews and Samaritans, a woman is an unlikely candidate for discussing issues of Torah and godliness, especially not this particular **sinful** woman. These issues are normally and best discussed by males – rabbis – in schools where they are trained in these topics.

Yet, Jesus has in His words freed the topic of truth and godliness from enslavement to Jewish or Samaritan tradition – to Torah. Truth and the worship of God are not limited by space (Jerusalem or Samaria). For Christ all along has been talking about Spirit which is not confined by the written letter of the law.

A weekday hymn from the 5th week of Pascha, offers us this insight into the Gospel lesson:



*THE SAMARITAN WOMAN CAME TO DRAW
WATER AT THE WELL,
BUT SHE FOUND ANOTHER LIFE-GIVING
STREAM FLOWING DOWN FROM THE WELL OF
HEAVEN.
SHE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO DRAW EARTHLY
WATER FROM A PERISHABLE WELL,
BUT WHEN THE WATER LEAPING FROM THIS
WELL REVEALED HIMSELF TO HER
HEART,
SHE RECOGNIZED HIM TO BE THE IMMORTAL
FOUNTAIN,*

WHOSE STREAMS WOULD EXTINGUISH THE FLAMES OF PASSION!

There is in the lesson the perishable well – normal water which quenches physical thirst. The kind of well that can run dry. There is also the deep stream well of heaven which slakes spiritual thirst – it is a well that cannot run dry. The well of heaven is an unusual image – we normally think of wells being dug into the earth – so we dig downwards. The well of heaven – is its opening found in heaven with its depth reaching down to earth? OR is its opening on earth and strangely reaches into heaven?



Water leaps from the well of heaven – it is a spring which flows into our hearts. The well of heaven has one end in heaven and one in our hearts, or perhaps it says that heaven itself is accessible through our hearts. Heaven is not out there – in the vast reaches of outer space, but is rather the place where God dwells.

For thus says the high and lofty one
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.

(Isaiah 57:15)

God's Motivation: Love or Evil?

Posted on [May 18, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

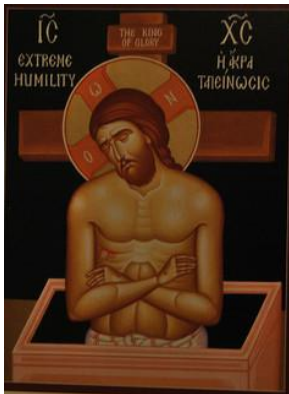


Recently I read some email comments about the power of evil in the world. The comments implied that it was because of evil on earth that God sent His Son into the world, and that the death of Christ on the cross was also the result of evil. Thus, the way the story was being presented it was the existence of evil that caused the incarnation.

The corollary of attributing God's saving action to evil would then be to say, thanks to evil, God became incarnate. For in this thinking it is evil which motivates God to do something for His creatures. Yet the witness of John 3:16 is clear that it is God's love which motivates Him toward the world, not the existence of evil.

*For God so loved the world
that He gave His own dear Son
that whoever believes in Him
would have eternal life.*

The true motivation of the God who is love is clear in the writings of certain saints of the Church. [St. Isaac of Syria](#) (7th Cent) attributes the entire incarnation and death of Christ to one thing only: God's love. Whatever happened to Christ is because of God's love, not because of the power of evil in the world. St. Isaac, so I've read, does not attribute the suffering and death of Christ to sin, original sin, Satan, death or evil. In fact some scholars say you would be hard pressed to find in Isaac's writings any such "theology of the cross": No substitutionary death of Christ, no demand for justice, no price being paid to anyone. I've read similar claims about [St. Ephrem of Syria](#) (4th Cent) as well.



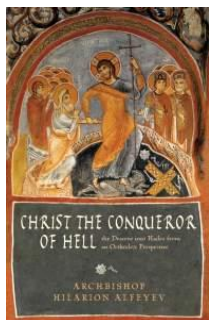
Some could rightfully object that neither St. Ephrem or St. Isaac encompasses the entire Tradition of the Church. Others would say that the theology of the cross is already nascent if not full blown in St. Paul whether the patristic saints mention it or not.

Be that as it may, St. Isaac's thought is part of the tradition of the Church, and his theology counterbalances those writings which overly credit evil with causing God to act. Evil is not the cause of everything, especially not of the incarnation of the Word. Some would say it can't be the cause of anything for it doesn't have substance.

"But the sum of all is that God the Lord surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation. 'For God so loved the the world, that He gave His only begotten Son over to death for its sake.' 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."(St. Isaac the Syrian [THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES](#), p 345)

Love, not justice let alone evil, is the basis of the incarnation according to St. Isaac. God's love, especially for the Eastern Patristic writers, is also the cause for Christ descending into Hades upon His death and rescuing all the dead from the power of sin, evil and death.

Archbishop Hilarion Alfeyev in his [CHRIST THE CONQUEROR OF HELL](#) points out



that there was a difference between Eastern and Western Patristic period writers in understanding the descent of Christ into Hades. The Western fathers tended to believe that Christ rescued only the righteous from Hades and left the sinners there. The Eastern fathers thought that would not really be love but only justice. The Eastern fathers, believing God's motivation to be love, saw Christ as emptying Hades of everyone. This is the triumph of God's love over sin, death and even the limits of justice. (Interestingly, according to St. Irenaeus, the heretic Marcion

wrote that Christ rescued the sinners from Hades – thus Cain and Lamech raced out of Hades to embrace Christ their savior when He descended into Hades, while the Jewish righteous – such as Noah – relying on Torah chose to stay in Hades thinking a graceful exit from Hades must be a trick, and that the OT righteous decided to stay in Hades until they had opportunity to show God how righteous they had been).

So the Eastern Fathers saw Christ as rescuing us from Hades and death (the both of which are our enemies), whereas the Western fathers tended to see Hades and death as part of God's justice and so God would hardly be saving us/sinners from his own justice. Perhaps in this Western version sin helps separate the good from the evil – the good work to overcome their sins while the evil must pay for their sins eternally. It is all the works-righteousness idea playing (working?) itself out.



Sin and death therefore are either that which separates us from God and which must be overcome by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ (a view common in the Christian East), OR sin and death are the very conditions necessary in order for God to be our Savior and thus can be said to cause salvation. A number of the Eastern Patristic Saints were convinced that love alone was what caused God to act on our behalf – in the incarnation and in the crucifixion. Evil is not the cause of God's plan of salvation, rather God's love destroys evil in all of its manifestations including sin and death. Evil does not cause God to act. The God who is love acts according to His own nature to overcome evil. Love conquers all.

Evangelism: Bringing Joy Not Imposing a Yoke



Posted on [May 18, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

On those mornings when we do Matins in my parish, we read the prescribed daily Epistle and Gospel readings. This morning, as we are in the Post-Paschal period the [Apostolos](#) reading was Acts 15:5-34. Portions of the lesson struck me for various reasons as being very apropos to life in the Church today.

[5] But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

Pharisees to this day continue to rise up and make such demands that religion be treated as law and the law be exactly followed. Pharisaism is alive and well in the Church.

Issues like these continue despite the fact that the Apostles once ruled on such thinking,

rejecting it. As wearisome as this is, one has to acknowledge it is biblical, even New Testamental.



[6] The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

How many hours have been consumed and how many miles traveled by clergy to debate such issues? Yet, the matter is never resolved, there will always be some new issues for people to get upset over and “point the finger” of accusation against others (Isaiah 58:9). “Others” never live up to those aspects of religious law we think important. But think St. Ephrem: Grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, or sister.

[7] And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. [8] And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; [9] and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith.



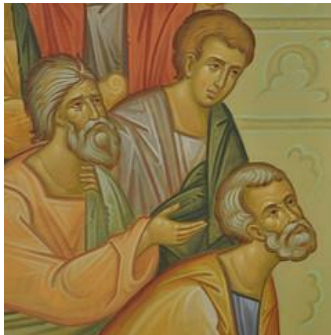
And to this day, some in the church love to make distinctions between people, separating and dividing. In St. Peter’s day it was Jew and Gentile. Now, despite the fact that we are each baptized and have received the Holy Spirit, and that all of us in the Church have heard the Gospel and had our hearts cleansed by faith, some continue to want to make similar distinctions between bishops and believing members, between clergy and laity, between men and women. Yet like Peter’s Gentiles whom he defended as having been blessed by God, all Orthodox – clergy and laity, men and women – have heard the Gospel, received the Holy Spirit and been cleansed through repentance and faith in and through the Sacraments of the one Church.

[10] Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [11] But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Imposing burdens and “a yoke upon the neck of the disciples” is still being done today. The yoke may change, but some see a need to burden others with rules and regulations which have been and are hard to bear. St. Peter said not to do this. His successors don’t always pay attention to that particular teaching of his.

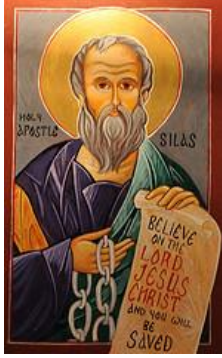
[12] And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Many new believers come into the Church – it is a miracle that people hear the Gospel and embrace the faith. It happens all the time. People who experience the joy of the Gospel and believe, receive the Holy Spirit, and they don’t have to know all of the rules and regulations of past generations. This was a mystery for those first Torah-bound Christians. How is it possible that God can act in people who don’t know or follow the Law of God? And note that the assembly of apostles and elders is silent as they think about the growth God is giving the nascent Church. They marvel at what God is doing rather than machinate about how to impose rules on those newly being born into Christ.



[13] After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brethren, listen to me. [14] Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. [15] And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, [16] ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, [17] that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, [18] says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.’ [19] Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, [20] but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. [21] For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues.”

St. James many scholars believe was even more Torah-bound than St. Peter. Yet, he recognizes that God works through the Gospel to change the hearts of non-believers. St. James advised that we not trouble the new converts with all manners of laws, rules and regulations, even if we believe they are from God.

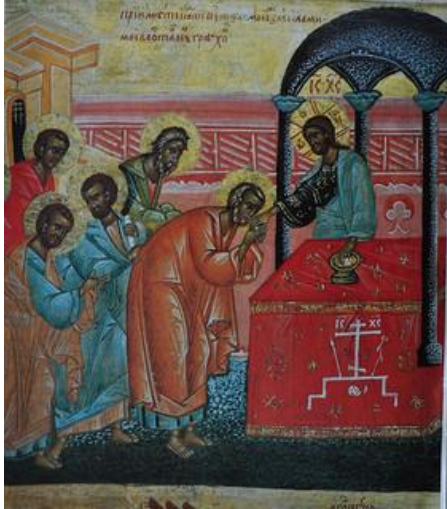


[22] Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, [23] with the following letter: “The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. [24] Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, [25] it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, [26] men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. [27] We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. [28] For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: [29] that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

So few rules. Amazing. Not 613 laws of Torah, not years of Tradition of the elders. Four simple rules is all that was required of those new converts to Christianity. And the Apostles believed this was in agreement with the Holy Spirit! Just these few things and you do well. What a blessing!

[30] So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. [31] And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. [32] And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. [33] And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brethren to those who had sent them.

And such a simple demand from the Apostles is met with rejoicing, not with dejection and despondency. So little is required, so much is given. And even with so few requirements, these new Christians are embraced as full members of the Body of Christ.



It is wisely said that there is nothing new under the sun. Pharisees still rise up to this day to trouble the Church. The Apostolic wisdom is still needed to recognize that though some of us may have accepted and lived by many religious rules, they are not mandatory for every generation. They can in fact be a yoke and burden that makes discipleship and salvation impossible. The Apostles did not drive out of the Church those newly believing members whom God had chosen and inspired with the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. They did not impose upon the new converts any heavy yoke, but they brought joy to the new faithful.

The Apostles rejected the concerns and fears of the Pharisaical members of the Church, and offered the hand of fellowship to those upon whom they as Christ's chosen leaders chose not to yoke with Pharisaism. It is the wisdom of the Apostolic Tradition as recorded in our Scriptures.

Seeing God

Posted on [May 19, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)



In John 9 we learn a Gospel lesson from the man who was born blind but who is given the gift of sight by Christ. Toward the very end of that pericope, Jesus finds the man whom he has healed – the man has been expelled from the synagogue community for giving honor to Christ for healing him.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe”; and he worshiped him.

The implication in John’s Gospel is that an encounter with Jesus is an encounter with God. To truly see Christ is to see also God the Father. Thus the man born blind sees God, even though at the beginning of the pericope he is physically blind and can’t ‘see’ at all, and after his eye sight has been given to him, Christ is nowhere to be seen.



Only at the very end of the Gospel Lesson after he has come to faith and an understanding of who Christ is, does He come face to face with Jesus the Son of God. Only when he has professed his belief about Jesus, confessed his faith in Jesus despite the persecution from the unbelieving community, does he experience the revelation in which he sees Christ.

“We need to return to the oft-repeated concern that ‘man shall not see me [i.e., my face] and live’ (Exod. 33:20, Judg. 13:22). We begin by noting that worldly reality is capable of experiencing theophanies, though not of producing them; the God-world relationship is of such a nature that God can appear without disruption. The intensity associated with certain theophanies does not happen because God stands in some



fundamental disjunction with the world, requiring much ‘sound and fury’ to occur in God’s wake. Some of the most ‘face to face’ comings of God are very quiet, it should be remembered, even childlike. There is a certain ‘nexus’ here that cannot be denied. Although God and world are categorically different, they are not as irreconcilable as repelling magnets or oil in water. Statements about not seeing God and living seem to contradict such basic understandings, however, or at least qualify them in an important way. It has often been pointed out that Scripture does not say God cannot be seen; rather, it assumes God can be seen, but one cannot live if this happens. The issues is always a

matter of life, not visibility. Even then, it seems that God is capable of allowing God to be seen by certain individuals who live to tell about the experience.” (Terence E. Fretheim, [The Suffering of God](#), pgs. 91-92)

In Christ the unutterable truth that one cannot see God face to face and live, is irreversibly altered. God reveals Himself to the world in Jesus Christ, and the eyes of all of those born blind to this truth are opened.

St. Ephrem on the Man Born Blind

Posted on [May 20, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

The Gospel of the healing of the man born blind ([John 9](#)) is in our Orthodox Church read as one of the Post-Paschal Sunday lessons. Like many of the Gospel Lessons in this period of the [Pentecostarion](#), it is related to the theme of baptism – the lesson begins with a discussion of sin, the blind man then washes in the pool of Siloam and he is healed, and he comes to a full faith in Jesus as the Son of God.



Since the man was born blind, his sight is not being restored, but rather he is being given the gift of sight for the first time in his life. Some of the Patristic writers in the Syrian tradition interpreted this to mean that a new act of creation was done by Christ – where something before did not exist, now new eyes exist. St. Ephrem of Syria “*understands that the blind man healed in John 9:6 had been born without any pupils. The miracle is thus not just of healing, but constitutes an act of creation...*” (S. Brock and G. Kiraz, [EPHREM THE SYRIAN: SELECT POEMS](#), p 47). As baptism bestows upon us the grace of new creation, so the blind man experiences being created anew through his encounter with Christ. St. Ephrem writes in one of his poems:

“He has renewed the heaven, because foolish men
Had worshipped all kinds of stars; He has renewed the earth
Which had grown old in Adam. With his spittle
There took place a novel fashioning:
He who is capable of all things puts aright both bodies and minds.”



The theme of the new creation is an idea we find in the New Testament, an idea which grew in Christianity as the work of Christ was considered. For the Christian tradition in the Orthodox East understood Christ the Word of God to be the one who created the world in the beginning (Psalm 33:6 – *”By the word of the Lord the heavens were made...”*), and by His presence on earth as Jesus Christ to be renewing that fallen creation.

Christians participate in the new creation through their own baptisms.

St. Ephrem continues:

“He is the Creator’s Son, whose treasure stores are filled
With every benefit. He who needs pupils,
Let him approach him:
He will fashion mud, and transform it,
Fashioning flesh and giving light to the eyes.
With a little mud he showed how, through Him,
Our dust was fashioned; the soul of the dead man, too,
Bore witness to Him how, by Him, man’s breath
Is breathed into him. By these latter witnesses
He is to be believed to be the Son [of God], the First Principle.”
(pp 57, 58)

As the footnote in the text explains:



“Ephrem along with several other early commentators, understood that the man whose sight was healed in John 9 had been born without pupils, thus making it a miracle involving creation, rather than just healing.” (p 57)

Just as the Word of God created the first human from the dust of the earth, so Jesus the incarnate Word takes the dust of the

fallen creation, mixes it with His spittle and anoints the eyes of the man born blind, creating for him new pupils so that for the first time the man born blind could see.

And he who was seated on the throne said,
“Behold, I am making all things new.”

(Revelation 21:5)

Blind, but Eyes to See

Posted on [May 21, 2012](#) by [Fr. Ted](#)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

(Matthew 5:8)



Jesus the incarnate God reveals to us the hidden mystery of God, and yet in that revelation there is hidden a mystery. We see in Christ both God and the image (icon) of God, but this very revelation reveals that God is more mysterious than we imagine. God whose creation is by definition “not God” becomes “not God”; in so doing He makes that which is “not God” to become God. “*God became man so that man might become God,*” said St. Athanasius.

He who has seen me has seen the Father... (John 14:9)

The incarnation opened our eyes to what God had previously hidden from us.

“In the present world, the glory of God is seen only by a select few, but ‘in the time to come’ all will see it, as it says in Isa 40:5, ‘The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together’. cf. Lev. Rab. 1:14. (Craig A. Evans, [Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament](#), pg. 100)

In Christ that glory of God is revealed to all. Isaiah’s “time to come” has come to pass.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14)

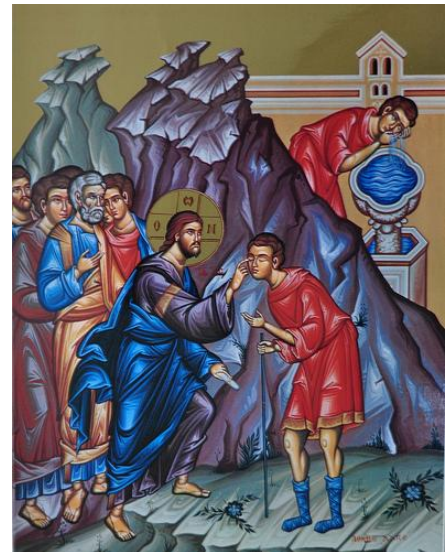
The Gospel Lesson of the man born blind who is given his sight (John 9) is most amazing because the man not only receives physical sight, he also sees God.

So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.



Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him." So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man

is a sinner." He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?" And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would



you teach us?” And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.” He said, “Lord, I believe”; and he worshiped him.



Ecumenical Councils in the Church

Posted on May 27, 2012 by Fr. Ted



“The first truly ‘ecumenical’ action was the Council in Nicea, in 325, the **First Ecumenical Council**. Councils were already in the tradition of the Church. But Nicea was the first Council **of the whole Church**, and it became the pattern on which all subsequent Ecumenical Councils were held. For the first time the voice of the whole Church was heard. We do not find in our primary sources any regulations concerning the organization of the Ecumenical Councils. It does not seem that there were any fixed rules or patterns. In the canonical sources there is no single mention of the Ecumenical council, as a permanent institution, which should be

periodically convened, according to some authoritative scheme. The Ecumenical Councils were not an integral part of the Church's constitution, nor of her basic administrative structure. In this respect they differed substantially from those provincial and local Councils which were supposed to meet yearly, to transact current matter and to exercise the function of unifying supervision. The authority of the Ecumenical Councils was high, ultimate, and binding.”
(Georges Florovsky, [**Christianity and Culture: Volume 2**](#), pg. 94)