

Notes from the Sermon for All Saints_Thoughts on the Trip to Wales June 12, 2023

Good morning:

I'll be leaving in a few hours for Wales via initially a day or so in Ireland to attend the RS Thomas & ME Eldridge Poetry and Arts Festival in the Welsh coastal village of Aberdaron where he was vicar of the Anglican parish there and his wife, Elsi, was an artist.

Aberdaron is at the end of Llyn Peninsula (across it is Bardsey Island -the site of a 6th century monastery, also called the "island of 20, 000 saints" – there is apparently little left of the monastery at this point – although pilgrimages are still made there).

In yesterday's sermon as we remembered the continuation of Pentecost in the celebration of All the Saints, I tried to explore the image presented in the liturgical text of the "chosen disciples through faith became instruments of the Spirit."

R.S. Thomas in his Introduction to the Penguin Book of Religious Verse which he edited said: "The nearest we approach to God is as creative beings (here he is paraphrasing the poet, Coleridge). The poet by echoing the primary imagination recreates."

I am interested in how all of us – given our talents, abilities, and circumstances – whether he are poets or not – can also be "instruments of the Spirit" and "creative beings."

Below are the two poems by Thomas that I shared in the sermon.

As I've been preparing for this trip, I worked through his volume of Collected Poems and chose those which have a certain meaning for me now – there will no doubt be others that will need to be added to this collection later.

I've attached them and his Introduction to the Penguin book.

Finally, as we pray for those who travel by land, sea, and through the air I welcome your prayers for me and all those who will be traveling from wherever to attend this Conference, assuming as always that there are "no accidental meetings."

In thinking of that petition, I am reminded that Thomas especially loved places where the land, sea, and sky came together: Aberdaron seemed to have been the place where these came together in a special way for him. So, in a sense, it represents both the destination but the means for the illumination of the journey.

Fr. John

Praise (CP, 318, 1977)

I praise you because
you are artist and scientist
in one. When I am somewhat
fearful of your power,
your ability to work miracles
with a set-square, I hear
you murmuring to yourself
in a notation Beethoven
dreamed of but never achieved.
You run off your scales of
rain water and sea water, play
the chords of the morning
and evening light, sculpture
with shadow, join together leaf
by leaf, when spring
comes, the stanzas of
an immense poem. You speak
all languages and none,
answering our most complex
prayers with the simplicity
of a flower, confronting
us, when we would domesticate you
to our uses, with the rioting
viruses under our lens.

Groping (1978)

Moving away is only to the boundaries
of the self. Better to stay here,
I said, leaving the horizons
clear. The best journey to make
is inward. It is the interior
that calls. Eliot heard it.
Wordsworth turned from the great hills
of the north to the precipice
of his own mind, and let himself
down for the poetry stranded
on the bare ledges.
For some
it is all darkness; for me, too,
it is dark. But there are hands
there I can take, voices to hear
solider than the echoes

without. And sometimes a strange light
shines, purer than the moon,
casting no shadow, that is
the halo upon the bones
of the pioneers who died for truth.

Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, June 4, 2023:

Pentecost:

The Gift of the Holy Spirit – In Time, Within Places, and Through People

Good morning:

A) TODAY'S GOSPEL READING ON HOW TO RESOLVE ISSUES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY: It's interesting that on this – the day after Pentecost – the following reading on how issues can be resolved within a community is assigned each year:

Matthew 18:15-20 (Gospel)

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

16

But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

17

And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18

Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19

Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

20

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

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B) NOTES FROM SUNDAY'S SERMON:

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – IN TIME, WITHIN PLACES, THROUGH PEOPLE

The following hymn – which has not been sung since Pascha – was restored for the Feast of Pentecost:

We have seen the True Light!
We have received the Heavenly Spirit!
We have found the True Faith!
Worshiping the Undivided Trinity, Who has saved us.

The Holy Spirit is identified as the “True Light.” It is also presented as

1) TONGUES OF FIRE:

- The gift of the Holy Spirit came down upon the gathered disciples as “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). This fire illumines, cleanses, and renews.
- Each person who has received the Sacrament of Chrismation (known as Confirmation in other church traditions) receives the “seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit,” the gift of Pentecost, and the calling for a life in which “God’s name is glorified.”
- Our church building was consecrated in 2004 by Bishop Tikhon – it was likewise Chrismated so that it might be a place where “God’s name is glorified.”

2) AS THE FIRE WITHIN THE BURNING BUSH:



- Moses experienced God’s presence within the bush that was burning, but was not consumed. God’s presence, His power, and His Love can be overwhelming, yet never prevents us from being who we truly are or at least – are meant to be.

Our Parish’s 6 Burning Bushes!



3) WITHIN THE BURNING HEARTS OF THE DISCIPLES IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN JESUS ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS:

- After realizing who Jesus was the disciples said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)
- Each liturgical experience prepares our hearts to “burn within us.”

4) THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN TIME, THROUGH PEOPLE, AND WITHIN PLACES:

- The Service for **Kneeling Vespers** ends with this prayer:

May Christ our God who sent down the divine, holy, consubstantial, co-eternal Spirit, identical in power and identical in glory, upon his holy Disciples and Apostles, and **through the Spirit enlightened them, and through them the whole inhabited world** ... have mercy on us and save us through his own loving-kindness.

The Holy Spirit enlightened the Disciples and Apostles and they likewise went out and enlightened the world.

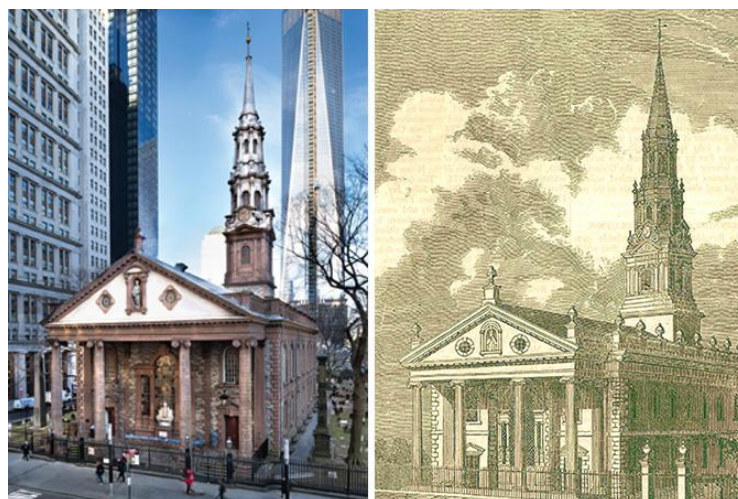
The Holy Spirit works through people, but also within and through the places where they meet and worship.

- I recently visited the newly built **Greek Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas** which is located near the site of the former World Trade Center – it was the only religious building destroyed during the 9/11 tragedy.



Besides the interior beauty of the church and its iconography, the church glows from within. It is hoped that this presence will provide consolation and the healing presence of Christ to everyone who visits the church or just passes near it.

- A similar place of God's love and consolation is located at the **St. Paul's Chapel** which is located on the edge of the destroyed World Trade Center towers, but was not damaged. For almost a year it provided spiritual, emotional, and therapeutic support for the first responders and those working in that area.



5) **CONCLUSION:** We celebrate on this last great day of the Feast of Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit which is revealed to us as fire and as “the True Light.” It comes to change and expand our hearts – setting them on fire – and attempts to work **through us and our community** in every way that can enable God’s saving and healing name and presence to be glorified.

Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, May 21, 2023:

A Pascha of the Faithful

This is the last Sunday of this year's Easter cycle. We have been focusing each week on one of the characteristics of the word, "**Pascha**," which is the Greek form of "**Passover**."

Passover is the event described in **Exodus 12** – the action of putting the blood of a sacrificed lamb over the doorway of Jewish homes that spared the life of their first born children. Passover, the moment of liberation and salvation and movement from death to life, is a defining memory for the foundation on the Jewish people.

We as Christians, in the words of St. Paul, recognize Christ as our "**Paschal lamb**" (! Cor 5:7) and we identify the Passover/Pascha as our experience of moving as well from captivity to freedom, from death to life.

Each week we have been considering one of the ways that Pascha is celebrated in our liturgical texts:

- ***The Pascha of the Lord***
- ***Pascha of Beauty***
- ***O Pascha of Incorruption***
- ***A Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer***

Our final exploration is the expression: ***A Pascha of the Faithful*** – but first a little context.

1) **AT EACH STAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY:** From Exodus 19 to the final chapter (40) the Jewish people remain at Mt. Sinai (also called at times, "Mt Horeb"). We hear how the Jewish they would be guided by God at "**each stage of their journey**" – a cloud would remain over them during the day and fire was in the cloud by night:

Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would **set out on each stage of their journey**; 37 but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel **at each stage of their journey** (Exodus 40:36-38).

After being at Mt. Sinai for almost a year, Moses and the people are instructed that it was time to leave and the ark of God's presence would lead them:

33 So they set out from the mount of the Lord three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of the Lord going before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them, **34** the cloud of the Lord being over them by day when they set out from the camp.

35 Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say,

**“Arise, O Lord, let Your enemies be scattered,
and let those who hate you flee from Your before your face” (Number 10:33-35).**

2) LET GOD ARISE AND LET HIS ENEMIES BE SCATTERED AND THE PASCHAL STICHERA:

When Orthodox Christians want to sing of God’ presence and guidance in their lives – how He goes before us at “each stage” of our life’s journey, especially in the light of His resurrection – we begin with the same affirmation as expressed in the opening lines of **Psalm 68** (in a slightly different form).

Here is how it is expressed in the **Paschal Stichera of Matins:**

**Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;
let those who hate him flee before His face (Psalm 68:1).**

Today a sacred Pascha is revealed to us,
A new and holy Pascha,
A mystical Pascha,
A Pascha worthy of veneration,
A Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer,
A blameless Pascha,
A Pascha of the Faithful,
A Pascha which has opened for us the gates of Paradise,
A Pascha which sanctifies all the faithful.

3) CONCLUSION: The Pascha – the “passing over” from bondage to freedom, from death to life is made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection. It is His Pascha. He restores Beauty and an incorruptible, imperishable reality to human existence. He is our Savior and Redeemer. He accomplishes what He alone can do.

He bestows this gift, this new life “which “sanctifies” and has opened the gates of Paradise” to **all the faithful** – to each of us.

His Pascha becomes ours!

Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, May 14, 2023:

“A Pascha Which is Christ the Redeemer”: The Samaritan Woman and Mother’s Day



From *Dura-Europos, Syria* (240-250)



Christ is Risen!

Throughout Great Lent as we read through the book of Exodus and still now within the Easter Season, we have been considering the importance of names: how God knew and called Moses by name; how God revealed His own name, "I AM," to Moses, and the various ways the name of this season, "**Pascha**," (the Greek translation of "Passover") has been developed in our liturgical texts.

We have explored:

- "**The Pascha of the Lord**"
- "**Pascha of Beauty**"
- "**Pascha of Incorruption**"

And today – pushing last week's image a little further – "**A Pascha which is Christ the Redeemer**," which we want to hear in the context of the Gospel story of the Samaritan Woman and Mother's Day.

1) **NAMES IN THE STORY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (John 4:5-42):**

On His way to Galilee, Jesus "had to pass through Samaria," and there met a woman by Jacob's Well. We never learn her name in the Gospel, though Tradition has called her, **Photini** ("the illumined or enlightened one").

Jesus never mentions His own name either, except that He becomes truly identified as the story develops. First, as His conversation with the woman evolves she "perceives" that He is a prophet (John 5:19). When He affirms to her that ultimately the place of worship, either for her as a Samaritan on Mt. Gerizim or in Jerusalem for Jews, will not matter because God must be worshipped in "spirit and truth" – she states that,

"I know that the **Messiah** is coming (he who is called **Christ**); when He comes, He will show us all things."

Jesus said to her, "**I am he**: I who am speaking to you" (24-26).

Jesus affirms both the expression, "**I AM**," and the name, "**Christ**" (the Anointed, the Messiah).

The woman tells her acquaintances, the other Samaritans, about Jesus. After being with him for several days they conclude that, "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**" (the name, Jesus, means, "**Savior**").

Jesus as the **Savior**, the Christ – the **Messiah**, will fulfill the liberating role of "**Redeemer**" by "giving his life as a ransom (for the redemption) of many" (Mark 10:45) – for all those who

cannot save themselves. He becomes and does what no one else can do.

2) THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AND MOTHERS: We don't know if the Samaritan woman was a mother, despite having five husbands and a current partner. But we do know that from this encounter with Jesus – something happened to her and that she was enlightened, changed. Moreover, as important as her testimony was to her fellow Samaritans and “many from that city believed in him because of [her] testimony” (5:39), yet in the end even more believed not because of her words but because she had led them to Jesus and they were convinced because they “heard for themselves” (5:42).

The Samaritan woman is sometimes called the first apostle because she openly proclaimed him in ways that led him to others.

This is what we especially celebrate today in the lives of our mothers, grandmothers, and godmothers.

St. Peter affirmed this special quality when addressing women in his First Letter:

‘If any [husbands] are unpersuaded by the word, they will be won over without any word by the conduct of their wives, observing your pure conduct in reverence; Let your adornment not be external – plaiting your hair and wreathing yourselves in gold, or wrapping yourselves in mantles – but rather the hidden human being of the heart, in that **imperishable** (“**incorruptible**”) reality of the gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's eyes is something lavishly opulent (3:1-4).

Among all of the things we remember and celebrate in the lives of the women we honor today – both living and deceased – are those times when they not only talked to us, but primarily how they showed and shared with us the reality of the ways, acts, and priorities of living that can endure, that are imperishable, and are incorruptible.

One might even say that in sharing these sometimes imperfect and yet redeeming aspects of their lives with us, they have helped us understand and get through those imperfect and yet hopefully redeemable moments in our own lives: so that we might be convinced through them of the presence of Jesus – ourselves.

CONCLUSION: Today we remember the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, identifying her as, Photini, as “the one who was illumined and began to see things differently.” We are reminded again of Jesus as the Savior, the Christ – the Messiah, the Anointed One, the “I AM,” who both revealed his own name as God and spoke by name to Moses, and the one who “came down” to liberate and redeem his people.

He continues to speak, to liberate, and redeem his people through his encounters with others who are enabled not just to share his words, but to direct others towards those saving encounters with him that can be life-changing, life-sustaining, and imperishable.

We give thanks to our mothers, grandmothers, and godmothers for those moments when they

have shared their own encounters with us: so that in hearing about Jesus from and through them, we might be led and convinced by having that encounter with him ourselves.

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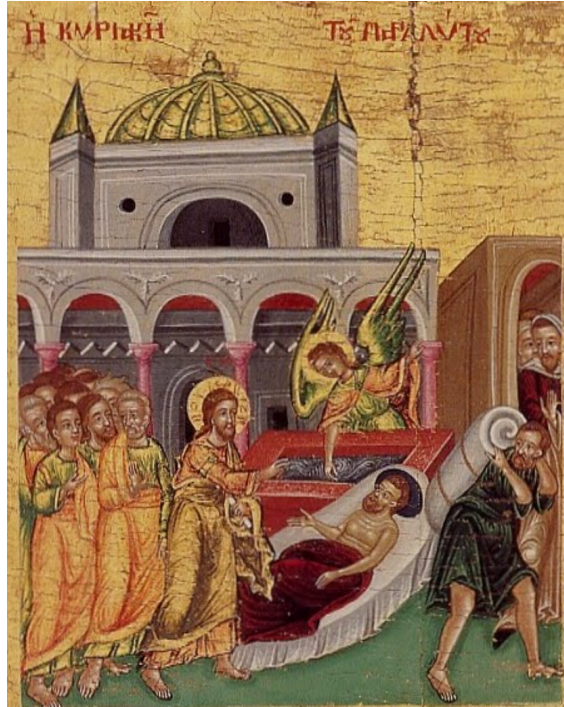
Fr. Thomas Hopko

Christ our Redeemer:

https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/namesofjesus/jesus_-_our_redeemer

Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, May 7, 2023: Sunday of the Paralytic

O Pascha of Incorruption



Scripture Readings:

- [Acts 9:32-42](#)
- [John 5:1-15](#)

My mother, Mary, loved to sing - especially in church. Perhaps the golden moments of her life took place when she was asked by our priest at the time, Fr. Paul Lazor, to help during those times when our regular choir director was unavailable: particularly during weekday festal liturgies, funerals, and memorial services.

Though my mother was untrained, she worked very well with Fr. Paul and they sang beautifully together. In fact, when I would return home during breaks at Seminary and attend a church service it was sometimes hard to join with them as their efforts were seamless.

Whenever we enter the Paschal season and begin hearing its music, I can still hear my mother singing a particular hymn known as the Exapostilarion, or the Hymn of Light. It goes like this:

In the flesh You fell asleep as a mortal man, O King and Lord.
You rose on the third day, raising Adam from corruption and destroying death.
O Pascha of incorruption, the salvation of the world.

Today, I want to speak on the expression: **O Pascha of incorruption.**

1) **A SERIES OF SMALL THINGS BROUGHT TOGETHER:**

Throughout the Easter season we are focusing each week on a particular way the word, “Pascha/Passover” is reflected upon in our liturgical hymns. We began with “Pascha of the Lord” and last week considered, “Pascha of Beauty.”

I have recently been sharing images of gardens and flowers with poems and hymns to help us think more generally and yet deeply about beauty. In the context of seeing Vincent Van Gogh’s Sunflowers we heard his words:

“Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together.”

We want to think today about how small things – brought together and done consistently and deliberately – can lead to great things.

2) **THE POWER OF A FEW LETTERS:**

In Greek and in English one can completely change the meaning of a word just by adding a prefix - which can be just a letter or two.

The power of the prefix, “in,” can be found in the Anaphora Prayer offered during the Divine Liturgy (the prayer said before the consecration of the bread and wine):

for You are God **ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible,**

In Greek, just by adding the letter “a” or alpha one can accomplish the same thing - as long as the word doesn’t already start with the letter a - then a different way must be used.

Often this can represent the transformation of something good or perhaps neutral into a negative meaning.

But in today’s example, by adding the prefix “in” or alpha the meaning is changed to something much better.

3) **CORRUPTION – INCORRUPTION: PHTHORAS – APHTHARASIAS:**

Corruption means:

- to destroy, perish, or decay
- languish (as in prison)

- spoil
- economic ruin
- lead astray, seduce, bribe, weaken, wrong, injure, frustrate
- leave empty
- change the original form
- Corruption prevents something or someone from being what they can potentially become

We hear in Sunday's Scriptures of the Apostle Peter's encounter with "a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed" (Acts 9:33). This Sunday is dedicated to the story of the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years and around him by the pool near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem were "a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water" (John 5:3).

One could say that they were all "languishing, perishing, decaying" and limited in what they might become. A liturgical text about the Paralytic said that he "was like an unburied corpse" (Vespers).

Incorruption – the opposite of corruption – made possible by just the addition of a small prefix (in or a) – implies healing or the transformation of that which is perishable to something imperishable. It expresses the transformation of that or the person who is broken and empty – to the reality of wholeness or of being whole which is made possible by Jesus.

When Jesus encounters the paralytic he literally asks him: "Do you want to be made whole?" (Jn 5:6) In fact, every reference in this passage to healing literally uses the Greek word for wholeness.

4) ST. PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS: SEEDS

Though this transformation from brokenness to wholeness, perishable to imperishable is found in today's Scriptural passages and throughout the Gospels, it is most directly expressed in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

He uses two particular examples of "small things" that continually demonstrate this transformation.

The first is the example of seeds. Those of us who love gardening are aware of the care required to grow anything: the development of good soil, the care required when planting seeds, and the need to water and weed: small acts that require consistency and diligence. This image has spiritual consequences as well.

We can do all of these things and yet we understand – that real growth is often beyond our best plans and expectations.

We are familiar with the Gospel of the Sower and the Seeds heard in the fall (Luke 8:1-15), but there is a direct connection as well to seeds and the Resurrection of Jesus.

During the Vesperal Liturgy on Holy Saturday, the first Old Testament reading from Genesis anticipates His Resurrection by reminding us of the initial three days of Creation. Here is the account of the third day:

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day (Genesis 1:9-13).

Later in the Gospel of St. John – "six days before the Passover" – Jesus said these words about Himself after entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat fall into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). These words became the epigraph for Fyodor Dostoevsky's book, *The Brothers Karamazov* and they are placed on his gravestones.

St. Paul affirms: "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown (in corruption) is perishable, what is raised is imperishable (incorruptible) - 1 Cor. 15:42).

5) ST. PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS: BEING CLOTHED IN CHRIST / PUTTING ON THE IMPERISHABLE

The Paschal season reflects the "new life" or "life of regeneration" made possible through Baptism. We sing this hymn during Baptisms and on Pascha (and other Feasts throughout the year):

"As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

We are given a white baptismal garment to wear when baptized which signifies the possibilities of a new life connected with the healing presence of Jesus. Though most of us baptized as infants don't remember or still have the garment, the sacramental significance of this garment and the new life – "having put on Christ" – stay with us our whole lives. In fact, Orthodox theologians say that at the end of our lives we will – hopefully – come to understand better the new life – that which is "imperishable" – which was given to us in the beginning – at Baptism.

St. Paul expresses this powerfully in First Corinthians:

50 I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable (that which is corrupt) inherit the imperishable (incorruptible).

51 Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable (incorruptible), and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable (corruptible) nature must put on the imperishable (incorruptible)), and this mortal nature must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable (corruptible) puts on the imperishable (incorruptible), and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55

“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: When we sing, “O Pascha of Incorruption,” we proclaim the end of corruption, of brokenness, of that which is ruined, spoiled, perishable and distorted. We sing and rejoice in the healing, the wholeness, and of all that cannot be corrupted and is now made imperishable by the victory and in the Resurrection of Jesus.

We celebrate the possibility to now become what we are called to be in “putting on Christ.”

St. John Chrysostom takes the final images from St. Paul’s letter and incorporated them in his Paschal Sermon that we read during our Service:

O death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and you are laid low;

Christ is risen, and the demons are struck down;

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice;

Christ is risen, and life is abundant and free;

Christ is risen, and there are no dead left in the tombs!

For Christ, when he was raised from the dead, became the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Glory to Him, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, April 30, 2023:

“Pascha of Beauty” and the “Beautiful Deed”



Sunday’s Scriptures:

- Acts 6:1-7
- Mark 15:43-16:8

Throughout the Easter season we will be focusing on how one word is developed in our festal hymnography: **“Pascha”** – which is the Greek translation of **“Passover.”**

Last week in considering the Sunday of St. Thomas we explored the first reference in our Easter Services – **“the Pascha of the Lord”** – which we hear during the Festal Canon. The expression comes at the end of the Holy Saturday reading from Exodus 12 which describes God’s command to Moses and the Jewish people that a lamb be slain and its blood put over the door of the people’s homes so that the Lord would “pass over” and spare their first born:

“The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13).

“It is the Lord’s Pascha” and eventually we learn to recognize Jesus Himself as the Paschal Lamb and His resurrection as His own “passing over” from death to life, which He extends to us and all people.

Today we’ll consider the expression, **“Pascha of Beauty,”** from the **“Praises”** of Easter Matins.

The Greek word for Beauty used in this case, “**terpnon**,” is often translated as “**delight**,” but it can be used for beauty as well.

We’ll consider **beauty** today in the following ways:

1) **Beauty as goodness**: The usual Greek word for beauty is: “**Kalos**” - which can mean:

beautiful, lovely, useful, noble, right, moral, virtuous, and **good**.

We see this especially in the opening chapter of Genesis where it is said that, “Then God saw everything He had made, and indeed, it was **very good**” (1:31).

As noted by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, “the final words here are ‘**lian kala**,’ which are stronger in their impact than the English “**very good**”; the Greek means, ‘**altogether good and beautiful**.’ The goodness of the world goes hand in hand with its beauty, and this beauty is apparent not only to the romantic artist, painting a sunset, but equally to the physicist or biologist.”

2) **Beauty as a call**: Metropolitan Kallistos goes on to point out that, “The Greek word for beautiful, **kalos** is “from the same root as the verb **kaleo**, signifying, ‘**I call, or invite**,’ and here we discern the primary characteristic of beauty: **it calls out to us, draws us to itself, it is intrinsically attractive.**”

3) **Beauty as an individual “piece” which connects us to the whole**: Archbishop Bruno Forte begins his book, *The Portal of Beauty*, by affirming that: “Beauty is an event; **beauty happens when the Whole offers itself in the fragment, and when this self-giving transcends infinite distance.**” We see this in particular during Holy Week when the crucified Christ – who combines in Himself all that it means to be human and divine – offers Himself, bringing together on the cross and in His resurrection all that is separated and broken in human life and restoring it to true goodness and beauty in God.

4) **The Beautiful Deed**: Today we remember **the Myrrhbearing Women**. Shortly before His betrayal during Holy Week, we heard this story of a woman who came and anointed Jesus and the liturgical hymns affirm that she “became one of the myrrh bearers”:

This expression the “beautiful thing” also gets translated as a “deed” or “work” and allows us to consider in the broad definitions of beauty that we have been exploring the questions:

What has been the “beautiful deed” that I have done which has brought beauty or goodness into a situation or into someone’s life or my own; or has called another into a friendship or effort of support that has helped break down divisions or confusion? How has any little thing that I have tried to do led to a connection with something bigger or more inclusive – led to wholeness?

Or, what “beautiful: thing, work, or deed can I do? What is possible?

5) **CONCLUSION:** This expression, “**Pascha of Beauty**” comes from the middle of the Paschal Matins Service, but we first hear it at the end of Forgiveness Vespers at the start of Great Lent. As the community approaches the priest and mutual forgiveness is taking place, the choir sings these words – imploring the possibility of the following “beautiful deeds”:

Pascha of beauty,

The Pascha of the Lord,
A Pascha worthy of all honor has dawned for us.
Pascha!

Let us embrace each other joyously.

O Pascha, ransom from affliction.
For today as from a bridal chamber
Christ has shown forth from the tomb and filled the women with joy saying:
Proclaim the glad tidings to the apostles.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.
Amen.

This is the day of resurrection.
Let us be illumined by the feast.
Let us embrace each other.
**Let us call “brothers and sisters” even those who hate us,
and forgive all by the resurrection,**
and so let us cry:
Christ is risen from the dead,
Trampling down death by death,
And upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

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See the articles by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware:

“Beauty Will Save the World” (attached)

“Safeguarding the Creation for Future Generations”

<https://www.orth-transfiguration.org/safeguarding-the-creation-for-future-generations/>

Notes from the Sermon on Sunday, April 23, 2023:

Singing the Song of Victory:

Pascha. The Pascha of the Lord



Today's Scriptures:

- [Acts 5:12-20](#)
- [John 20:19-31](#)

Throughout the Sundays during the Easter season I want to focus on the way one word, “**Pascha**” – the Greek translation of “**Passover**” – is developed throughout our liturgical texts.

We initially hear it in the first **Ode of the Canon** sung when we return from our Easter evening procession around the church on Saturday night/early Sunday morning:

This is the day of Resurrection.
Let us be illumined, O people.
Pascha. The Pascha of the Lord.
For from death to life,
and from earth to heaven,
has Christ our God led us,
as we sing the song of Victory:

Christ is risen from the dead trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

But it is really presented to us for the first time a few hours earlier in a reading from **Exodus** that is one of the Old Testament passages assigned for the **Vespertal Liturgy of Holy Saturday**:

Exodus 12:1-11 (Vespers, 3rd reading)

1

Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,

2

“This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.

3

“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.

4

‘And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb.

5

‘Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

6

‘Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.

7

‘And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.

8

‘Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

9

‘Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire – its head with its legs and its entrails.

10

‘You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.

11

‘And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. **It is the Lord’s Passover.**

St. Paul develops the same image in a slightly different way when in writing to the Corinthians, he identifies **Christ as the Paschal Lamb** - “our **Passover/Pascha**.” We hear this on Holy Friday evening, during the Matins of Holy Saturday:

For indeed **Christ, our Passover (literally: our Pascha)**, was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7).

We can understand the importance of the phrase: “**The Pascha of the Lord**” in two ways:

- 1) **“Passing over from death to life, from earth to heaven” – Passover/Pascha** is the remembrance of how the firstborn of the Jewish people were “passed over” and not killed during the tenth and final plague sent to the Egyptians. It then marks their “passing through” the Red Sea as they escaped the attack of the Egyptian army: so it celebrates how the Lord was personally involved and guided their “passing over” from captivity and bondage to the path of freedom and life.

The Lord identified with the “passing over” of the Jewish people: Their passover was also His.

The Resurrection of Jesus, Himself being the Paschal lamb, is the true image of the one whose “passing over” from death to life, opens the way from earth to heaven. **It is indeed the Pascha of Jesus.**

- 2) **Who is the Lord?** When we hear a reference to the Lord, as we so often do during our worship, we are brought back to the encounter Moses had at Mt. Sinai when he first met God’s presence within a bush that was burning, but not consumed (Exodus 3). What occurs next has been called, “one of the most important happenings recorded in the chronicle of time” (Rosemary Edmonds) - God revealed His name to Moses: “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). This name, YHWH, could not be spoken aloud by the people, and was replaced in Hebrew with the word, “**Adonai,**” and in Greek, “**Kyrios**” – both meaning, “**The Lord.**”

When we sing, “**Pascha. Pascha of the Lord**” – we understand that **Christ is the Lord** who spoke and revealed Himself to Moses from within the burning bush and God’s name, “I AM,” is really, as seen in the halo around the head of every icon of Jesus – His name as well.

- 3) **The Burning Bush, Pascha, and St. Thomas Sunday:** A final theme must be considered and incorporated within today’s discussion – the story of St. Thomas and the question of belief.

On Saturday several of us attended a Conference at Princeton Seminary led by two Orthodox liturgical artists, Jonathan Pageau (from Canada) and Aidan Hart (from England). Jonathan primarily works as a stone sculptor and Aidan utilizes many different materials. They both expressed the importance of coming to know the kinds of materials that they will use: recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and incorporating this knowledge in their creative efforts.

They both also identified their goals as always trying to manifest that which is inherent or is “burning” within the image of a person or physical object being depicted, so that the viewer may be invited into a deeper relationship with the image.

In today’s Gospel, St. Thomas, who was not present when the resurrected Jesus initially visited His disciples, claimed that he would not believe in His resurrection unless He could, “see in His hands the print of the nails, and put [his] finger into the print of the nails, and put [his] hand into His side” (John 20:25). He could not believe unless he had personally touched and experienced the crucified and now resurrected body of Jesus.

Jesus's resurrected body still maintained the wounds in His side and hands from the brutality of the crucifixion – the signs of His complete identification with the human condition – of what it means to be fully human – knowing humanity's strengths and weaknesses. He invited Thomas to "touch" these wounds and to have his relationship with Christ – with God Himself, and indeed with all that "burns" within the wounded body of humanity – restored. It is this invitation that renews Thomas's belief.

He responds: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

It's interesting that both the Gospel and Epistle end with affirmations that Jesus's death and resurrection – "the words of this **life**" (Acts 5:20) – should be spoken about to the people and that in believing in Jesus a person "may have **life** in His name" (John 20:31).

The **Pascha of the Lord** is the affirmation that the words about Jesus and even His name lead us to the "passing over" of all things that prevent or limit us from coming to know and experiencing real life, from being in contact with the wounded, but resurrected Body of Christ which is the Church and all of its members.

Glory to Him and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

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Here are some links for the works of Aidan Hart and Jonathan Pageau:

- Aidan Hart:

<https://aidanharticons.com/>

- Jonathan Pageau:

<https://www.pageaucarvings.com/index.html>