

“The Mystery of the Cross”

A Homily on Great Friday of Holy Pascha

By St. Gregory of Nazianzus



For we have learned to believe in and to teach the Deity of the Son from their great and lofty utterances. And what utterances are these? These: God The Word He That Was In The Beginning and With The Beginning, and The Beginning. “In the Beginning was The Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” (Jn. 1:1) and “With You is the Beginning,” and “He who calls her The Beginning from generations” (Isa. 41:4) Then the Son is Only begotten: The only “begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, it says, He has declared Him (Jn. 1:18). The Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light. “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6); and “I am the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). Wisdom and Power, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). The Effulgence, the Impress, the Image, the Seal; Who being the Effulgence of His glory and the Impress of His Essence,” and “the Image of His Goodness” (Wis. 7:26), and “God the Father has set His seal on Him” (Jn. 6:27). Lord, King, He Who is, the Almighty. “The Lord rained down fire from the Lord” (Gen. 19:24); and “A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom (Ps. 45:6), and “Who is and was and is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8) all which are clearly spoken of the Son, with all the other passages of the same force, none of which is an afterthought, or added later to the Son or the Spirit, any more than to the Father Himself. For Their Perfection is not affected by additions.

There never was a time when He was without the Word, or when He was not the Father, or when He was not true, or not wise, or not powerful, or devoid of life, or of splendor, or of goodness.

But in opposition to all these, do you reckon up for me the expressions which make for your

ignorant arrogance, such as “My God and your God,” or greater, or created, or made, or sanctified. Add, if you like, Servant (Phil. 2:7), Obedient (Phil. 2:8), Gave (Jn. 1:12), Learned (Heb. 5:8) and was commanded, was sent, can do nothing of Himself, either say, or judge, or give, or will. And further these His ignorance, (Mk. 13:32) subjection (1 Cor. 15:28) prayer (Lk. 6:12), asking (Jn. 14:16), increase (Lk. 2:52), being made perfect. And if you like even more humble than these; such as speak of His sleeping, hungering, being in an agony (Lk. 22:44) and fearing (Heb. 5:7) or perhaps you would make even His Cross and Death a matter of reproach to Him.

His Resurrection and Ascension I fancy you will leave to me, for in these is found something to support our position. A good many other things too you might pick up, if you desire to put together that equivocal and intruded god of yours, Who to us is True God, and equal to the Father. For every one of these points, taken separately, may very easily, if we go through them one by one, be explained to you in the most reverent sense, and the stumbling-block of the letter be cleaned away that is, if your stumbling at it be honest, and not deliberately malicious. To give you the explanation in one sentence, what is lofty you are to apply to the Godhead, and to that Nature in Him which is superior to sufferings and incorporeal; but all that is lowly to the composite condition of Him who for your sakes made Himself of no reputation and was incarnate yes, for it is no worse thing to say, was made Man, and afterwards was also exalted. The result will be that you will abandon these carnal and coarse doctrines, and learn to be more sublime, and to ascend with His Godhead, and you will not remain permanently among the things of sight, but will rise up with Him into the world of thought, and come to know which passages refer to His Nature, and which to His assumption of Human Nature.

For He Whom you now treat with contempt was once above you. He Who is now Man was once the uncompounded. What He was He continued to be; what He was not He took to Himself. In the beginning He was, uncaused; for what is the cause of God? But afterwards for a cause He was born, and that cause was that you might be saved, who insult Him and despise His Godhead, because of this, that He took upon Him your denser nature, having converse with flesh by means of mind. While His inferior Nature, the Humanity, became God, because it was united to God, and became One Person because the higher Nature prevailed in order that I too might be made God so far as He is made Man. He was born but He had been begotten: He was born of a woman but she was a Virgin. The first is human, the second Divine. In His Human nature He had no Father, but also in His Divine Nature He had no Mother. Both these belong to the Godhead. He dwelt in the womb but He was recognized by the prophet, himself still in the womb, leaping before the Word, for whose sake he came into being. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes (Lk. 2:41) but He took off the swathing bands of the grave by His rising again. He was laid in a manger, but He was glorified by angels, and proclaimed by a star, and worshipped by the Magi.

Why are you offended by that which is presented to your sight, because you will not look at that which is presented to your mind? He was driven into exile into Egypt but He drove away the Egyptian idols. He had no form nor comeliness in the eyes of the Jews (Isa. 53:2) but to David He is fairer than the children of men. And on the Mountain He was bright as the lightning, and

became more luminous than the sun (Matt. 17:2), initiating us into the mystery of the future.

He was baptized as Man but He remitted sins as God not because He needed purification rites Himself, but that He might sanctify the element of water. He was tempted as Man, but He conquered as God. Yes, He commands us to be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33). He hungered but He fed thousands; yes, He is the bread that gives life, and that is of heaven. He thirsted but He cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (Jn. 7:37). Yea, He promised that fountains should flow from them that believe (Jn. 7:38). He was wearied, but He is the rest of those who are weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28). He was heavy with sleep, but He walked lightly over the sea. He rebuked the winds, He made Peter light as he began to sink. He pays tribute, but it is out of a fish; yea, He is the King of those who demanded it (Jn. 19:19). He is called a Samaritan and a demoniac but He saves he who came down from Jerusalem and fell among thieves (Lk. 10:30); the demons acknowledge Him, and He drives out demons and sinks in the sea legions of foul spirits (Lk. 8:28-33); and sees the Prince of the demons falling like lightning (Lk. 10:18).

He is stoned, but is not taken (Jn. 8:59). He prays, but He hears prayer. He weeps, but He causes tears to cease. He asks where Lazarus was laid, for He was Man; but He raises Lazarus, for He was God (Jn. 11:43). He is sold, and very cheap, for it is only for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15); but He redeems the world, and that at a great price, for the price was His own blood (1 Pet. 1:19) As a sheep He is led to the slaughter, (Isa. 53:7); but He is the Shepherd of Israel, and now of the whole world also. As a lamb He is silent, yet He is the Word, and is proclaimed by the voice of one crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). He is bruised and wounded, but He heals every disease and every infirmity (Isa. 53:23). He is lifted up and nailed to the Tree, but by the Tree of Life He restores us; yea, He saves even the robber crucified with Him (Lk. 23:43); yea, He wrapped the visible world in darkness. He is given vinegar to drink mingled with gall. Who? He who turned the water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), who is the destroyer of the bitter taste, who is sweetness and altogether desire (Song 5:16) He lays down His life, but He has power to take it again (Jn. 10:18) and the veil is rent, for the mysterious doors of Heaven are opened; the rocks are cleft, the dead arise (Matt. 27:51). He dies, but He gives life, and by His death destroys death. He is buried, but He rises again; He goes down into Hell, but He brings up the souls; He ascends to Heaven, and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead, and to put to the test such words as yours. If the one give you a starting point for your error, let the others put an end to it.

This, then, is our reply to those who would puzzle us; not given willingly indeed (for light talk and contradictions of words are not agreeable to the faithful, and one adversary is enough for us), but of necessity, for the sake of our assailants (for medicines exist because of diseases), that they may be led to see that they are not all-wise nor invincible in those superfluous arguments which make void the Gospel. For when we leave off believing, and protect ourselves by mere strength of argument, and destroy the claim which the Spirit has upon our faith by questionings, and then our argument is not strong enough for the importance of the subject (and this must necessarily be the case, since it is put in motion by an organ of so little power as is our mind), what is the result? The weakness of the argument appears to belong to the mystery, and thus elegance of language makes void the Cross, as Paul also thought (1 Cor. 1:17). For faith is that which

completes our argument. But may He who proclaims unions and looses those that are bound, and who puts into our minds to solve the knots of their unnatural dogmas, if it may be, change these men and make them faithful instead of rhetoricians, Christians instead of that which they now are called. This indeed we entreat and beg for Christ's sake. Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20), and quench not the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19); or rather, may Christ be reconciled to you, and may the Spirit enlighten you, though so late. But if you are too fond of your quarrel, we at any rate will hold fast to the Trinity, and by the Trinity may we be saved, remaining pure and without offense, until the more perfect showing forth of that which we desire, in Him, Christ our Lord, to Whom be the *glory* forever. Amen.