Behold What Manner of Love

Rev. Fr. Anthony Cook

Last time we talked about how the Creed pivots from the careful and thorough discussion of the perfect Divinity of the Son of God to the description of His Incarnation, His humanity, shared with us in our brokenness, and of the central importance to the Christian Faith of this point, that the man Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem, the step-son of the carpenter, the rustic preacher Who fell afoul of the secular and religious authorities of the day, Who was crucified and killed for not much more than jealousy, Who rose from the dead and talked with His friends, and was seen going back up into the heavens by them….this Man was the very same Son of God of Whom we have been speaking all this time in the Creed.

Thus the use of the word “Who” to make this transition. This word assures us that the One about Whom oceans of ink were spilled in affirmation of His true and perfect God-head - He is the One born in Bethlehem. It tells us that all our talk, all our effort so far, is just a prelude, a reminder of the basic truth about how great and utterly beyond our reach are God’s power and glory, so that we can be properly and duly astounded and amazed that He, the One we could not touch or understand or even begin to approach, has come down to us, has lowered Himself, and has touched us, has revealed Himself to us, has not only come within our reach, but has embraced us, in all of our brokenness.

To comprehend the enormity of this is impossible for the human mind, I think - but we have to try nevertheless. And when we try, the question that springs most frequently to mind, I think, is why. Why would God do this? What does He have to gain from lowering Himself in this way, from suffering, from dying? Even knowing the outcome, knowing that Death could not hold Him - why go through the humiliation, why take on human flesh, why be born in a stable, why endure temptation, why finally ascend the Cross. He could have left, have escaped, have gone back, at any time - He did not have to do it at all. So why did He?

These next words of the Creed give us an answer to this question, that it is: “for us men and for our salvation.” And truly, here is a marvel. In this fallen world, we do not find anyone who acts truly and perfectly unselfishly. Even ourselves, when we gain nothing tangible from our apparently selfless action - we gain the positive sense of ourselves, as being the sort of person who does good things. This validation, this assurance of rightness, is something we crave, something we need. But God does not need to save us to assure Himself that He is good, for goodness comes from Him, and is defined by Him. Nor does God come to save us because someone else expects Him to do so - there is no one else to whom He answers.

No, God comes to us “for us,” for our sake, because of what we need, not because of what He needs or wants from us. And this, truly, is love - as St. John says, “not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10).
The other point that we have to note here is that the Creed at this point, at least as translated and recited each Sunday in the Liturgy, makes a judgment call about English style and what people will understand from it. You may have noted that it says the Lord’s action of mercy and self-emptying love was and is granted “for us men and for our salvation.” In this day and age, we often read such language as referring to males exclusively - but it is not so here. What must be understood, however, is that the Greek language has a word for humanity at large “Ἀνθρώπος” and a word for male human beings, “Είδη” or, in Modern Greek, “Άνδρα”. We see these words in English in the term “anthropology” and the term “android” respectively.

The point is that the original Greek of the Creed, says clearly that Christ came not to save the “males”, but to save all of humanity. The reason that we use the word “men” and not “human beings” in the current English version of the Creed is primarily one of style, I think. The word “human” does not fit the character and vocabulary and style of the rest of the Creed. Still less does, “human being” or “anthropic entities.” So the translators here have gone with “Who, for us men” to communicate the Greek “Τὸν δὲ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους” - but the import remains universal, reflecting God’s active love for all humankind, and communicating no preference for either the males or the females of the human race. He comes for us - for ALL of us.

More than that, He comes “for our salvation” - to deliver us from all that disturbs and troubles and destroys us - which is to say, He comes to save us from distance from Him, from our current bondage to selfishness and confusion. He comes to reconcile us to Him, to restore us to the communion with Him for which we are created. This salvation is not a matter simply of our being removed from a bad place to a “Good Place” such as the “Cloud 9” of old cartoons, complete with a halo and harp and a boring eternity of “heavenly bliss.” This is not the “salvation” of which we speak. Rather, the Creed here affirms the glorious reality that the Lord makes all things new, even us. It tells us that His entrance into the Creation is an invitation to us to commune with Him once again. Salvation is to be united with Christ, and in Christ, to be made children of the Father.

This is the marvel revealed to us here - that God lowers Himself to us in order to raise us up to Him. This phrase, “Who, for us men and for our salvation” assures us not only of God’s action, coming to save us, but of His reason and purpose for doing so, the end toward which that salvation tends. To once again quote St. John the Theologian (1 John 3:1) “Behold, what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the children of God!” In Christ, we have received an impossible Gift - the Father has given His Son to us. And the reason is that He loves us, that He calls us to return to Him, to become His children, as we were created to be.

But we cannot be united with Him unless He lowers Himself to us. So next time, we will see the Creed describe that moment when, out of love for us, the Son of God laid aside the glory that intrinsically belong to Him and entered into our fallen and broken world, that moment when He came down from Heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.

The above is the twenty-fifth installment of Fr. Anthony’s catechetical podcast, updated weekly at http://theruleoffaith.typepad.com. We also have a weekly Bible Study each Tuesday at 6 pm - all are welcome.

Please note, as well, that we live stream each Sunday’s Orthros & Divine Liturgy on our parish Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/c/franthonyc-stgeorgesouthgate. A recording of the Sunday Sermons is also posted on the YouTube channel. As we are speaking of our internet offerings, please remember to check the parish website: http://www.stgeorgesouthgate.org, for announcements, and for an updated calendar of feastdays, readings, services, and events.
Holy Week Services for Kids

Sunday, April 21
Palm Sunday with Procession
Orthros/Liturgy @ 8:40 & 10 am

Friday, April 26
Unnailing Service @ 3 pm (AFTER Retreat)

Holy Saturday Morning, April 27
First Anastasi (Proti Anastasis)
Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil from 9 am to 11 am
THROWING OF BAY LEAVES
Kids should bring pots and spoons to make noise!

NOTE: ALL CHILDREN ARE WELCOME at all the HOLY WEEK SERVICES, but these three Services are especially suited to the young.

HOLY FRIDAY RETREAT
for ALL Sunday School kids

April 26, 2019 11:30 am to 3 pm

Lunch for kids and parents - FREE @ 11:30 am

(Please call the Church office to RSVP - 734.283.8820; you can also request a school absence letter for Friday or any other days in Holy Week.)
EASTER SUNDAY MORNING
Sunday, April 28, 2019
Approx. 1:30 am
"MAGIRITSA"
MEAL
(following Divine Liturgy)

YOUR NAME _____________________________________

HOW MANY: ADULTS ________ CHILDREN _________

Reservations online (www.stgeorgesouthgate.org) OR through the Church office (734.283.8820) no later than Wednesday, April 24.
***NO TABLE ASSIGNMENTS***

SAINT GEORGE FEAST DAY
Monday, April 29, 2019
FESTAL LUNCHEON
(following Divine Liturgy)

Cost: FREE

YOUR NAME _____________________________________

HOW MANY: ADULTS ________ CHILDREN _________

Reservations online (www.stgeorgesouthgate.org) OR through the Church office (734.283.8820) no later than Wednesday, April 24.
***NO TABLE ASSIGNMENTS***

Donation: Adults $15.00
Children 11 years and under Free
HOLY WEEK & FEAST DAY DONATIONS 2019

The following are available for donations during Holy Week and Pascha.

Please contact the Church office to make a donation.

**Easter**

Garland for Salutation Fridays $82.00/week
Palms and Bay Leaves $565.00
Epitaphios Flowers (DONATED)
Daffodils $192.00
Wreath for the Cross (Holy Thursday) $450.00

**Feast Day of St. George**

(Narthex Icon) $150.00
(Procesional Icon) $80.00
(Icon of the Iconostasis) $130.00

We also need at least one family to commit to bake & bring the Artoclasia Breads for the Feast Day on the morning of April 29 (Liturgy)

If you wish to make a general donation to the Easter & Feast Day expenses, please feel free to do so by filling out the following information and placing it in an envelope with your check or cash.

Please make checks payable to St. George Greek Orthodox Church

Name________________________________________
Address_______________________________________
City__________________________State____Zip_______
Phone__(_____)________________________________

Enclosed Check/Cash Amount $_______________
George Greek Orthodox Church
Southgate, Michigan

Ladies Philoptochos

PALM SUNDAY

FISH DINNER

April 21, 2019
Immediately Following Divine Liturgy

Donation
Adults: $15.00
Children 11 yrs. and under free

Please reserve your seat and pay in advance
at the Reservation table, Church office, OR
on our website (www.stgeorgesouthgate.org)
no later than Wednesday, April 17.
ST. GEORGE CHURCH
LUNCH/DINNER RESERVATIONS

Palm Sunday Fish Luncheon
April 21, 2019

PLEASE PRINT

Purchaser Name: ________________________________________________

Purchaser Phone: _(_____)____________________________________

How Many Tickets?

12 Years & Up _____ ($15/pp)  11 yrs & Under Free _____

Payment Method:

Make Checks Payable to: St. George Church

Cash _____  Check _____  Credit Card _____

Credit Card Number: ____________________________ Exp. _____ / ________

3 Digit: _____  Billing Zip Code _______  MO. / YEAR

Names of Individuals At Your Table You Are Purchasing Tickets For Including Yourself:

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Sit With Or Near: _____________________________________________

Please Make Reservations By Wed., April 17, 2019

Palm Sunday Fish Dinner Receipt – Year 2019

Purchaser: ________________________________

# Adult _____  # Children _____

Reservation taken by Philoptochos member ____________________________