

A PASCHAL REFLECTION

In the allegory of “The Cave,” Plato describes one prisoner who breaks free and finally sees the sun and true reality and thereafter, realizes what he had previously experienced chained and living in a cave were mere shadows. However, he was unable to describe or convince the other prisoners to follow his lead to the true reality. The same holds true for many of us, who refuse to accept that our daily reality, if devoid of personal communion with our Resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, is a mere shadow of “real life.”

These shadows are manifest in our contemporary world with personal thoughts such as, “What do I want to do with my life?” We all do this as we consider career paths or changes, whom to marry, and even what will “I do” in retirement. Yet, is this way of us living and directing our lives appropriate? St. Paul taught a different approach when he wrote, “**You are not your own...For you were bought at a price**” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This “price” was the suffering and death on a Cross by our Lord, Jesus Christ. How then must we respond as Christians to our Risen Lord as we make decisions and live our lives?

First, we must remember that we “put on Christ” at our baptism and became “new life.” St. Paul clarified this sacramental reality when he wrote “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). In other words, we understand that if we want to leave “the shadows” and experience life as intended by God, we must allow Christ to direct our lives, and we must abandon self-direction and control.

So what is the actual path that allows God’s will to be done in our lives. The Church Fathers call this path “kenosis,” which means self-emptying. This is so critically important in the spiritual life because otherwise, we remain “full of ourselves.” In order to live in relation to God (anthropos), we need to make room for Him. But how do we empty ourselves? And what is it exactly that we are discarding? The way of kenosis is best described as surrender, whereby we let go and allow the presence of God to become incarnate in our lives. That which must be discarded or let go are those things that prevent this incarnation of Christ in our hearts because they enslave us. When Jesus instructed the rich young man to sell his possessions and follow Him in order to gain eternal life, He knew that the young man was enslaved to the “gold,” “for he had great possessions.” The “gold” that enslaves us, however, comes in many forms, including power and prestige, as well as even less tangible but equally dangerous “possessions” such as bitterness, hate or hardness of heart.

To hang on to the gold amounts to willful resistance to God incarnating Himself in our lives. Being so attached-whether knowingly or otherwise-to these possessions, we feel that without them we would die. Yet...die we must. This “new life” through baptism can

only follow death...the death of living without Christ in our lives. Fear of not having these things compel us to hang on to them, yet we must in faith remember “perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18). Only by letting go of our “gold” can room be allowed for our Risen Lord to enter our lives.

Thus, in this joyous season of Pascha when all things are made new, let us remember that Christ endured the Cross for each of us, so that we “may have life,” real life, and have it “more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10).

Dn Paul Tsahakis

St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church

Charlotte, NC