



60th Year September 9, 2012 Pamphlet # 37 (3093)

THE ELEVATION OF THE SON OF MAN

Jesus the incarnate God

The Gospel reading of today's Sunday is related to the impending great feast of the Elevation of the Precious Cross. It comes from a dialogue which the Lord had with the Pharisee Nicodemus one night at the beginning of His earthly public activity. Nicodemus is he who helped Joseph of Arimathaea in taking the Lord down from the cross and bearing Him.

Nicodemus believed in the Lord, but still had a very humble opinion about Him. He saw Him as a teacher sent by God. So for this reason the Lord chastised him for his weak faith and in this discussion revealed quite a few truths referring to His Godhead. So correcting Nicodemus He tells him: "No one has ascended to heaven, aside from him who descended from heaven, and He is none other than I, the son of man". In other words He means the following: "Don't think that I am such a teacher, like the prophets, who came from the Earth. I am coming from heaven. None of the prophets has ascended to heaven. I however am there continually".

With this brief phrase the Lord reveals His divine nature, but also His incarnation as well. He prophesies His ascension to heaven and explains that He is not a human who will be self deified, but God who became man, in order to deify human nature and to lift it up to the throne of God. Thus He reveals that the aim of his coming the earth is to lift us humans to heaven. How though will this occur? Through His crucifixion.

Jesus and the copper snake

Lord wanting to speak about His world-saving crucifixion, avoids naming it with clarity. He doesn't say, "I will be crucified", but He refers Nicodemus to a very ancient image of His crucifixion, the copper snake. Specifically, in the book of Numbers, it mentions that when the Jews were in the desert with Moses, because they murmured once against God, snakes appeared, which were biting many and killing them. Then Moses prayed to God and following His commandment constructed a copper snake and placed it on a high spot, so that whoever would be bitten and turn his gaze towards this snake, escaped from death.

The Lord reminding this event to Nicodemus prophesies to him that He Himself must also be elevated, so that whoever believes in Him would be saved from death and have eternal life. He purposely associates the copper snake with His crucifixion, in order to stress the unbreakable relationship between the Old and the New Testament. None of these two can be understood without the other one. So for this reason also, the opponents of the Church shoot accusations against the Old Testament, because they don't want to overturn the New Testament.

Also, with this prophetic word of His, the Lord reveals that He is not proceeding to the crucifactory passion without wanting to. For centuries He foreknew the manner with which He would save people and pre-imaged it in various ways, words and deeds. So He will not undergo essentially any harm from His crucifixion, but on the contrary, from this, salvation will spring forth to humans.

Aside from these things, He reminds us of the story with the copper snake, so that no one be scandalized and say: "How is it possible for them to be saved who believe in a crucified one, in one who is a prisoner to death"? If the ancient Jews looking to the copper image of the snake escaped from death, much more so we who believe in the Crucified One, with good reason will enjoy incomparably greater benefaction escaping from eternal death. Because neither on account of the weakness of the crucified Lord, nor due to the great power of His crucifiers did the crucifixion occur, but because, as the Lord stresses to the Pharisee Nicodemus, God loved the world very much. So for this reason He also gave His only begotten son to crucifixion, so that all those who believe in Him might not perish, but have eternal life.

At this point we must pay attention to the exchange between the phrases "Son of man" and "Only begotten Son of God". The Lord using for Himself both of these phrases, reveals both of His natures, the divine and human one, which are unbreakably united in His person. He will be elevated on the cross as the son of man, and He will abolish death and offer eternal life as the Only begotten Son of God. As God He will not suffer anything upon the cross, and as a human He will not be led to nonexistence, but will become the first fruits of the resurrection of all the dead. The Church rejects as completely unacceptable the delusions both of those who maintain that God suffered, (theopaschites) as well as those who maintain that the soul dies (thnitopsychites).

So having in our mind the very philanthropic character of the first coming of the Lord, let us struggle honorably to utilize the saving results of His crucifixion, so as to escape death and become partakers of eternal life. Because in the first coming "God did not send His son into the world in order to judge the world, but so that the world would be saved through Him." (John 3:16).