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Chancellor's Update

Once Again... The Word

We have received so many good comments from both inside and outside the United States requesting more explanations of the Word from the Doctors and Fathers of the Church that we bring you St. Athanasius' homily of The Word.

During the third and fourth centuries, although Christianity was growing, a priest named Arius publicly taught that the Word of God is not eternal and could not be the Son of God. This scandalous heresy, known as Arianism, continued to grow, but was temporarily crushed by the Council of Nicaea. As Arianism reemerged, bishop Athanasius (297-373 A.D.) of Alexandria continued to proclaim God's truth, especially in his famous treatise on the Incarnation, which expounded the redemptive work of Christ. However, other bishops and government officials persecuted and accused him of sedition, murder, and bloodshed. He was called a disturber of the peace and an enemy of the gods. Five times he was banished and spent seventeen years in exile. Known as the Champion of Orthodoxy, Athanasius defended the church against overwhelming odds. In more recent times John Henry Cardinal (now Blessed) Newman (1801-1890) studied extensively and wrote on Arianism. His writings rendered the whole situation of that time intelligible. He described Athanasius as "a principal instrument after the Apostles by which the sacred truths of Christianity have been conveyed and secured to the world." (Butler's Lives of the Saints, Volume II, Thurston and Attwater, P.J. Kenedy and Sons, New York, 1963)

The Word visits the earth, where he has always been present, and sees its evil condition. He takes a human body, born of a pure virgin in whose womb he makes human flesh his own, in which to reveal himself, conquer death, and restore life. For this purpose, the incorporeal and incorruptible Word of God comes to our realm. But he was never far from us, because no part of creation has been emptied of his presence: he fills all things everywhere, while remaining present with his Father. But he humbled himself and came to show his love for us, and to visit us.

He saw the human race perishing and death and decay reigning over it.

He saw that the penalty for our sin gave this corruption a firm hold over us, and that until the law was fulfilled this could not be changed.

He saw how awful it was that his own work was passing away.

He saw the great wickedness of humanity, and how it had grown little by little to an intolerable pitch.

And he saw all humanity under penalty of death.

Seeing all this, he took pity on our race, and had mercy on our weakness, and lowered himself to our corruption.

He could not bear to let death have mastery, to allow these creatures to perish, and his Father's handiwork come to nothing, and so he took on a body, no different from ours.

He could simply have appeared to us, coming in some grander way, but this was not what he wanted.

He took a body like ours, from a pure and spotless virgin who had never been with a man. Being the powerful creator of everything, he prepared this body in the virgin as a temple to himself, and appeared in it and lived in it.

Having taken a body like ours because we were all under the penalty of death, he gave his body up to death in our place, offering it to the Father. He did this out of love, so that we who are counted as having died in him might be freed from the law that meant our ruin. The power of this law was completely spent in the Lord's body, and so has no foothold left against his fellow human beings.

For the Word, perceiving that in no other way could the corruption of men be undone except by death as a necessary condition, yet while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the place of all, and might, because of the Word which had come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be held back from all by the Grace of the Resurrection.

Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, immediately He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent...

And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all men by a like nature, naturally clothed all men with incorruption, by the promise of the resurrection. For the actual corruption in death no longer has holding-ground against men, by reason of the Word, which by His one body has come to dwell among them.

And just as, when a great king has entered into some large city and taken up his abode in one of the houses there, such city is at all events held worthy of high honor, and no enemy or bandit any longer dares descend upon it and subject it, but, on the contrary, it is viewed as entitled to all care, because of the king's having taken up his residence in a single house there, so, too, has it been with the Monarch of all. (This excerpt is from *On the Incarnation of the Word* by St. Athanasius as reprinted in *Inside the Vatican*, December 2018).

Each generation thinks that its members are smarter than their forebears. From the reading of the "Word" from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church one can now really appreciate the wisdom and knowledge that came before us. We should carefully read and reread these last two Updates in order to properly appreciate what God has given us. Like a great pearl of great price do not put these pearls on the bookshelf or this "Light of the World" under a cover, but present this great knowledge to your family, friends and members of the younger generation.

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