

## The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 101

*St. Gregory of Nyssa Orthodox Church, Kingston, Ontario, Canada*

### Topic 12: The Death and Resurrection of Christ

*(The Life, Chp.4; The Faith, Chp.9)*

Quote from the *Lenten Triodion*, sung during Matins of Great and Holy Friday:

Today He Who hung the earth upon the waters  
is hung upon the Cross.  
He Who is King of the angels  
is arrayed in a crown of thorns.  
He Who wraps the heaven in clouds  
is wrapped in the purple of mockery.  
He Who in the Jordan set Adam free  
receives blows upon His face.  
The Bridegroom of the Church  
is transfixed with nails.  
The Son of the Virgin  
is pierced with a spear.  
We venerate Thy Passion, O Christ,  
We venerate Thy Passion, O Christ,  
We venerate Thy Passion, O Christ,  
Show us also Thy glorious Resurrection!  
*(The Life, p.42)*

Theme: Through His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, Christ Who is the **love of God incarnate**, has destroyed the power of sin and death and has raised humanity to the right hand of God. *(The Faith, p.139)*

Christ's love is **the Love that is stronger than Death**.

**Death** had kept us humans in **fear**, ever since the Garden of Eden. The Devil used death to subject the humans to himself and to make us his **slaves**. By destroying death, Jesus **destroyed** the Devil who was using the power of death to enslave us.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [*Christ Jesus*] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might **destroy him** who had **the power of death**, that is, the **devil**, and **release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**”

Hebrews 2:14-15

Death and the Devil were both conquered by Jesus' LOVE. He poured out His love, to the point of death. He did not fail – not even for a moment – to love His Father and to love us...and in so doing He (the New Adam) succeeded where the first Adam had failed.

“The essence of sin is **the failure to love**. In their rebellion, Adam and Eve refused the ‘divine love...’ offered them by God, preferring instead life on their own. Cut off from loving communion with God, mankind has become enslaved to its own self-centeredness, the inevitable consequence of which is death. (*The Faith*, p.139)

Cut off from the Giver of Life because of his failure to love God, man found himself having a very limited existence of a few years—like a clock winding down—before his body would breakdown and return to the dust from which it was created. Death was a huge consequence for mankind's selfish and rebellious act of walking away from the gift of life from God, the Giver of Life.

Death has no respect for persons: it grabs all. Listen to this quote by St. John of Damascus in his funeral hymn: “Who is poor, who rich? Who is the master, who the freeman? Are not we all ashes? The beauty of the countenance is moldered, and **death has withered up all...**” (*The Life*, p.43)

God was not going to let the Devil use Death to steal away His beloved creation: Listen to the famous Pre-Communion Prayer of St. Basil the Great:

“For Thou dost **not wish**, O master, that the work of Thy hands should **perish** [*see 2 Peter 3:9*]...but Thou desirest that **all men should be saved** [*1 Timothy 2:4*]...” (*The Faith*, p.139)

God wanted to save man, “Yet only one thing could accomplish this: a love stronger than man's failure to love, ultimately, a love stronger than death.” (cf. Song of Songs 8:6) (*The Faith*, p.139)

A man was needed who could finally love God truly the way God intended for him to love. But only God's love could be strong enough to conquer death. Jesus, therefore, as the Son of God Incarnate, is “divine love made flesh.” **He is the God-man**.

**John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

**True love is the total gift of oneself to another**—“the emptying of oneself.”

Jesus offered the ultimate and greatest possible selfless **self-sacrifice**—because as the **Creator** He humbled Himself to the point of actually dying as a **creature**—a man—for the sake of His Creation.

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup>but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled** Himself and became **obedient** to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:6-8

The Son of God took on our human nature. “It was not enough for our salvation, however, that He simply come and live on earth as a man. He had to assume every aspect of human existence, for as St. Gregory the Theologian said, ‘**What is not assumed is not healed.**’ This means that in order to free us from **the bondage of sin** [our rebellion] and **death** [the consequence into which we had fallen due to our rebellion], Christ had to share in our death as well as in our life.” (*The Life*, p. 42-43)

He had to **fill** Death and Hades with His **Life** and **Presence**.

He had to **heal** man’s rebellion by His divine **obedience**.

He had to **love** where mankind had failed to love.

He had to **heal** man’s self-centeredness by His divine **self-sacrifice** on the Cross.

He had to **destroy**, by His Resurrection, man’s slavery to corruption and death, for He has **life** in Himself (John 5:26).

He had to **conquer** man’s pride with His Divine **humility**.

He had to **overthrow the Devil**—the Rebel—by destroying the Devil’s powers: sin and death.

“It is important to note that the suffering and death of Christ was effective for man’s salvation not merely because Christ was an ‘innocent’ man unjustly slain but because He was God. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote, ‘We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. **Only God could** take upon Himself the consequences of

man’s sin [**corruption and death**] and **thereby destroy them**. Only God could enter the realm of **death** and **fill it** with His immortal **life**:

“Descending through the Cross into hades—that He might fill all things with Himself—He loosed the pangs of death. He arose on the third day, having made for all flesh *a path to the resurrection from the dead*, since it was not possible for the Author of Life to be a victim of corruption.”  
(Liturgy of St. Basil) (*The Faith*, p.142-43)

“I’m outa here!” “The Resurrection of Christ frees all mankind from the bonds of corruption and death, because death had **no power** over Him **Who is life and love Himself**. (*The Faith*, p.143)

## Jesus on the cross: bait on a hook, for the Devil.

The Devil thought he had conquered Jesus, when Jesus died. The Devil was in for a big surprise. It was the Devil who was defeated and bound by Christ’s Resurrection.

The Icon of “The Descent into Hades” always shows the Devil as an old man bound with chains, while it shows Christ in Glory, freeing the souls.



Ever since Adam and Eve died, Hades was the place where all souls stayed—both good and bad. They were not in heaven. They were existing outside of the presence of God. Then, when Jesus died, His Divine Presence and Glory burst into Hades and took over. The entire situation changed.

St. Peter taught that Jesus, in His human spirit, went down to Hades where the spirits were kept in prison and proclaimed His Good News.

1 Peter 3:19 – “He went and **preached to the spirits in prison.**”

1 Peter 4:6 – “For this reason the **gospel was preached also to those who are dead**, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

After His Resurrection, the bodies of many of the Old Testament **saints arose** and went into the city of Jerusalem, where many saw them.

<sup>50</sup>And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

<sup>51</sup>Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, <sup>52</sup>and the **graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised**; <sup>53</sup>and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Matthew 27:50-53

Jesus, by His Divine power, **opened a way** for the righteous spirits waiting in Hades to **exit Hades and to enter Heaven**. The “Gates of Paradise” were opened again, so to speak, allowing fallen humanity a chance to enter the Presence of God again.

Adam had walked away from God’s presence, and so God had come down to the depths of where Adam was in order to find him and to lead him home.

Because one man—Jesus—showed that He has the power to defeat Death and get out of Hades, having opened the door, He sets us all free.

Christ has taken away the “Sting of Death”. We have the hope of the Resurrection. Now, when we die, those who die in Christ do not have to go in their spirits into torment in Hades, but can simply exit straight from this life into the next life—into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Finally, on the Last Day—the Day of Christ’s Second Coming and the Universal Resurrection—all the spirits of all the men and women who have ever lived will be united to their glorified, resurrected bodies. All humanity—both the good and the bad—will be raised by Christ Who has defeated Death. Some will rise to eternal life; others will rise to eternal damnation. (See John 5:21-29)

### **Summary:**

Christ’s Death and Resurrection have accomplished for us many things, the foremost of which are three:

#### **1) the forgiveness of sin**

Christ’s **obedience** to the point of voluntary death **undoes** Adam’s disobedience. True love lays down its life for its friends. Christ has done this for each of us.

“Jesus’ life of complete sacrifice, even to the point of dying a criminal’s death, has the power to destroy the pride and self-centeredness that wrecks our lives. Through His self-sacrifice on the cross, we can receive forgiveness for our sins and the power to overcome the temptations which plague us, ‘For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid them that are tempted’ (Hebrews 2:18).” (*The Life*, p.48)

## 2) the freedom of humanity from the bondage of death

Jesus Christ—as the Uncontainable God—could not be held or contained by Death. He entered the realm of death to **fill it with His life**.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [*Christ Jesus*] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might **destroy him** who had **the power of death**, that is, the **devil**, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Hebrews 2:14-15

## 3) the transfiguration of humanity and the entire universe

Just as humanity is part of creation, when man fell into slavery to corruption and death, so too the whole creation was likewise subject to death.

But creation eagerly awaits its chance to be “repaired” – transfigured—and to share in glory, being filled with God.

<sup>19</sup>For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; <sup>21</sup>because **the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption** into the glorious liberty of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Romans 8:19-22

When humanity is raised incorruptible—and has put on immortality—then too the entire creation will be new, filled with God’s glory.