



THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

“I BELIEVE...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven... [He] was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried: [He descended into hell]; And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures:”

(From “The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed” with interpolation from “The Apostles’ Creed”)

In her *credo* about the Person and Redemptive Work of Christ, that the Church has made since the 3rd century, she echoes the Gospels & Epistles that Jesus’ Passion was a battle. Yet, He did not engage in physical combat with either the Jews or the Romans, but in spiritual combat with what the Old Testament Prophets predicted He would fight: the Devil, Sin, and Death. This was His fulfillment of Isaiah 61 which He proclaimed in the Nazareth synagogue:

*to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
and the day of vengeance of our God;*

Jesus would conclude the atoning and salvific work of His earthly ministry at Calvary’s Cross by defeating mankind’s three greatest spiritual foes. Every Passiontide, the Church celebrates that our Savior ransomed us back to God, justified us in truth and righteousness, and died to merit for us the hope of everlasting life.

Supporting Scriptures

Ss. Matthew 27 & Mark 15 St. John 18:37-38

Colossians 2:6-15 1 Peter 2:21-25

Philippians 2:5-11 Romans 5:6-17

QUESTION – Please identify where the Bible reveals Christ’s defeat of the Devil, Sin, and Death.

The Victory Of Christ

In Early English Poetry
Based on Holy Scripture

*An installment in the series:
Orthodox Anglicans Studying Scripture*

Lesson 1: The Victory of the Cross

“The Jousting of Jesus”

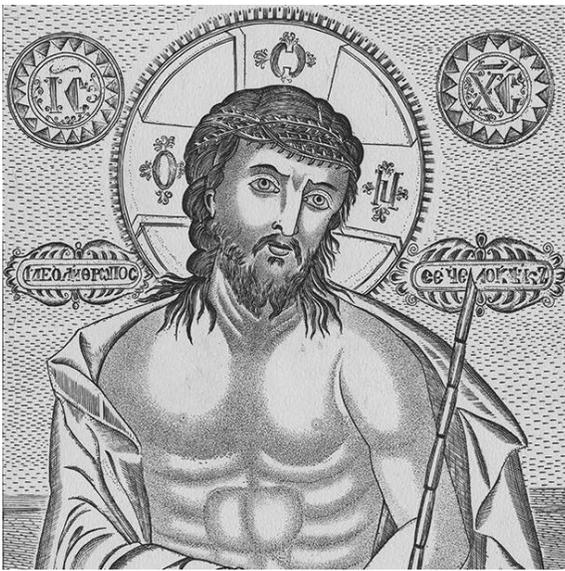
This selection from William Langland’s 14th century epic poem “*The Vision of Piers Plowman*” epitomizes the medieval conception of the conflict at Calvary with a metaphor of its era. It also a very alliterative way of describing the battle (“joust” & “Jesus”) that works as well in Latin as in Middle English (“juxto” & “Jesu”).

QUESTION – What other alliterative and further poetic techniques did you find in “The Jousting of Jesus” which help to convey both the drama and its doctrine?

In this scene, Langland narrates the climax of Christ’s Passion—His trial and crucifixion—but carefully incorporates the medieval love for dualities and didactics. The poem is artistically beautiful in the manner in which it depicts the spectacle of the judgment hall and Golgotha, but it also teaches truth through its meditation on the various spiritual concepts inspired by the Evangelists own accounts and the theology of Jesus’ triumph through His suffering, death, and (anticipated) resurrection.

QUESTION – Although Langland does not refrain from portraying the injuries endured by Christ in His “joust” with His enemies, how does he also weave in the paradox of Jesus’ transforming His apparent loss into victory?





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“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴ Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

⁸ He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

⁹ And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”

(Isaiah 53:3-5, 7-11)

Other Supporting Scriptures

St. John 19 Acts 8:32-33

Hebrews 10:5-10 Hebrews 12:2

1 Peter 2:21-25

QUESTION – Why do you believe Christ’s sufferings in His Passion are so viscerally anticipated by Isaiah and recorded by the Evangelists and Apostles?

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Lesson 2: The Man of Sorrows

“Woefully Arrayed”

This poem from the 15th century is written from the perspective of the suffering Christ, who is the speaker. He first draws His audience to attention with the wounds of His Passion, which He continues to relate as He narrates the story of betrayal, trial and torture, and crucifixion. The poem typifies the late medieval devotion to the Humanity of Jesus, especially in His torments, which was also popularly expressed in painting and plastic art.

QUESTION – Poetically, what alliterative and other rhyming techniques did you find in “Woefully Arrayed” which help to convey both the drama and its doctrine?

How do you believe that the poem both *affectively* and *effectively* makes real the record of Christ’s Passion that we find recorded in the Gospels?

Perhaps most powerful is the spiritual invitation of Jesus to the reader at the end of the poem. He explains why He was willing to suffer these agonies and indignities and pleads with the objects of His sacrifice to respond to Him according to the purpose that made the Atonement.

QUESTION – What is the appropriate way for the Church and Christian soul to react, liturgically and spiritually?





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Devotion to the Cross of Christ began to develop especially in the early medieval period and became enshrined in Holy Week liturgies and personal piety of the High Middle Ages. While the Resurrected Jesus was by no means overlooked, the Crucified Savior of Calvary resonated with the Western populous enduring the duress of societal growing pains caused by frequent political upheaval, war, and disease. The late 6th century hymn compositions of Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus remain the most enduring extant examples of this religious subject, such is in the Good Friday chant *Crux Fidelis*:

*Faithful cross, above all other:
one and only noble tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
none in fruit thy peer may be:
sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
sweetest weight is hung on thee.*

*Bend thy boughs, O tree of glory!
Thy relaxing sinews bend;
for awhile the ancient rigor
that thy birth bestowed, suspend;
and the King of heavenly beauty
gently on thine arms extend.*

Supporting Scriptures

St. Matthew 24:29-31 St. Luke 23:32-49
Acts 5:30 & 10:39 1 Corinthians 1 & 2
Galatians 2:20 & 6:14 Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14

QUESTION – Why does meditation on Christ’s Cross remain an important spiritual discipline and how do we routinely employ its image in our liturgical exercise and churchmanship practice.

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Lesson 3: The Tree of Glory

“The Dream of the Rood”

This poem preserved in the 10th century Vercelli Book is an Anglo-Saxon composition from Kingdom of Northumbria, dating back possibly to the 8th century.



A fragment of the poem (lines 39-64) was inscribed onto the famous Ruthwell Cross, an 18-foot monument similar to the Irish high crosses that may have been used by missionaries as an evangelization instrument.

The poem is set up with the narrator having a dream/vision. In it, he is speaking to Jesus’ Cross. The Crucifixion story is told from its perspective, which begins with the Cross’s cutting, then its reception of Christ as both are pierced with nails. Then, just as with Christ, the Cross is resurrected, and adorned with gold, silver, and gems. The Cross then charges the visionary to share what he has seen with others. The man gives praise to God for the vision and is filled with hope for eternal life and his desire to once again be near the glorious Cross.



