

## **New Testament Session #2: Our Sharing in the Dying and Rising of Jesus Christ**

What does Christ's death and resurrection mean for us? To figure this out let's take a look at what God has in store for those who die united to him.

The last words of the Nicene Creed, which we say at every Sunday mass are:

*We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

This isn't referring to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, because the Creed talks about that earlier:

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.*

So what is the Creed talking about here?

It's talking about the resurrection from the dead of everyone:

*Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:25-:29*

And:

*We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-:17*

At the end of time everyone will be resurrected. Those who are alive at the end of time will be changed physically and spiritually right then, those who are already dead will be reunited with their bodies.

God doesn't just want to save our souls. Salvation isn't just about our spirits going to Heaven. God ultimate plan is for people to be united to him body and spirit. God wants to

eventually change our souls and our bodies. When we talk about resurrection we are talking about *real, physical, human bodies*.

This is a very confusing and difficult thing to understand, especially since even though this is one of the most important things that Catholics need to understand it is almost never talked about.

### **Three Stages of the Relationship Between the Physical and Spiritual in Jesus Christ Himself**

To understand this we need to look at Jesus. I want to look at three stages that Jesus went through when it come to the relationship between his spirit and his physical body. We will all go through these same three stages.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Stage-Ordinary Human Physical Reality**

The 1<sup>st</sup> stage was what we are experiencing right now, ordinary physical reality. We are a mix of body and spirit living in the everyday world God has created. So let's take a look at how Jesus experienced this.

##### 1. Jesus Was Conceived:

*Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. Luke 1:30-:31*

##### 2. He was born:

*And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:4-:7*

##### 3. He grew up:

*They (Mary and Joseph) returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2:39-:40*

##### 4. He showed normal human emotions:

*When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept. John 11:33-:35*

5. He ate:

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26:26-:28*

6. He slept:

*A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" Mark 4:37-:40*

This last passage shows that he also performed miracles, but performing miracles doesn't mean someone isn't truly human.

*Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, (rise and) walk." Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. Acts 3:6-:7*

7. He was tempted, but without sin:

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:14-:15*

As sinners we can falsely assume that this is a normal part of the human condition. It's not. None of us is experiencing the fullness of what it means to be human. Sin is not part of God's original intent for humanity. For a discussion of this see the notes from the second class of the Old Testament session of Gifts of Finest Wheat:

[http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/gfw/notes\\_1\\_22\\_09\\_origiansin.pdf](http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/gfw/notes_1_22_09_origiansin.pdf)

In his sinlessness Jesus shows us what we are supposed to be, what humanity is supposed to be. He has experienced our weakness and struggle, but without the failure and guilt that inevitably sometimes results when our temptations lead to sin.

8. He was afraid and struggled, but without loss of faith:

*And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46*

This aspect of Jesus' incarnation takes a little bit more time to explain. So here goes...

Jesus experienced death. St. Paul tells us “that the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) And he also tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) So we are all sinners deserving of death. But, thanks to be God, Jesus has taken this death upon himself as we are told “for our sake he (God the Father) made him (Jesus Christ) to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21) and “he himself bore our sins in his body” (1 Peter 2:24). See my homily from Ash Wednesday of this year for a further discussion of the reality of Christ taking our sins upon himself:

<http://www.sspeterandpaul.net/Homily.htm>

But the consequences of sin that had to be faced by Jesus faced were more than just physical death. We’re treading on somewhat thin ice here. Even the best theologians are forced into some degree of speculation as they comment on these words of Jesus, and what they mean when it comes to the degree and nature of his suffering. But the words of the conservative and evangelical Anglican theologian J.I. Packer (On April 30<sup>th</sup> during our class on St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans I’m going to talk quite a bit about the conversation I was able to have with him at a conference just prior to beginning seminary) seem to be among the least inadequate when it comes to this issue:

How should we explain Jesus’ belief in the necessity of his death? How should we account for the fact that what drove him on throughout his public ministry, as all four Gospels testify, was the conviction that he had to be killed? And how should we explain the fact that, whereas martyrs like Stephen faced death with joy, and even Socrates, the pagan philosopher, drank his hemlock and died without a tremor, Jesus, the perfect servant of God, who had never before showed the least fear of man or pain or loss...on the cross declared himself God-forsaken?...Had Paul or John been asked this question, there is no doubt what they would have answered. It was because Jesus was to be made sin, and bear God’s judgment on sin, that he trembled in the garden, and because he was actually bearing that judgment that he declared himself forsaken of God on the cross...Look at the cross, therefore, and you see what form God’s judicial reaction to human sin will take. What form is that? In a word, withdrawal and deprivation of good. On the cross Jesus lost all the good that he had before: all sense of his Father’s presence and love, all sense of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, all enjoyment of God and of created things, all ease and solace of friendship, were taken from him, and in their place was nothing but loneliness, pain, a killing sense of human malice and callousness, and a horror of great spiritual darkness.<sup>1</sup>

Those who discuss Jesus’ sense of separation from the Father are often accused of pitting the will of the Son against the will of the Father. To this charge Packer responds:

The idea that the kind Son changed the mind of his unkind Father by offering himself in place of sinful man is no part of the gospel message – it is a sub-Christian, indeed an anti-Christian, idea – for it denies the unity of will in the

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<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer & Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 45-47.

Father and the Son and so in reality falls back into polytheism, asking us to believe in two different gods.<sup>2</sup>

So when “Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46) at the deepest level his will and the will of his Father remained unified, but as he experienced the full consequences of sin he was deprived of any of the peace or comfort that would normally result from this union. Jesus experienced not just physical suffering and death as he paid the price for our sins, but also spiritual, emotional, and mental trauma. In this cry we see the fullness of Christ’s unity with humanity even, and especially, in our most awful and traumatic moments.

So as we conclude this session we see that as we are conceived, born, grow, weep, eat, sleep, are tempted, and suffer we are united with Jesus in the first stage of his physical reality. He experienced ordinary, everyday, real human life as we do.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Stage-Death**

The second stage, death, is something that Jesus has already experienced and something every singled one of us will experience some day.

### 1. Jesus Died:

*Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. Mark 15:37*

### 2. Jesus Was Buried:

*Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who, though he was a member of the council, had not consented to their plan of action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea and was awaiting the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. After he had taken the body down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried. It was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind, and when they had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils. Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment. Luke 23:50-:56*

### 3. Jesus’s soul was separated from his body:

*For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 1 Peter 3:18-20*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 36.

This is a difficult and mysterious passage in a number of ways, the discussion of what Jesus was doing in the time between his death and resurrection is very complex, but this passage affirms for us that Christ's soul was active while his lifeless body was in the tomb.

Our bodies can be lifeless, but our souls are alive, for better:

*Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:39-:43*

Or for worse:

*The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Luke 16:22-:25*

One day we will follow Jesus in experiencing death. Our souls will be separated from our bodies we will be as dead as lifeless as Jesus was when he was laid the tomb. Every individual person who dies enters into Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory. They experience the reality of their soul being separated from their body, and their soul enters into an experience that we really want to share in or one that we really don't want to have anything to do with.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Stage-Reunion of Body and Soul in Glorified Resurrection Body**

Jesus experienced something after this stage. So will we. To understand what Jesus experienced let's take a look at what happened to Jesus.

1. Christ didn't stay dead:

*But at daybreak on the first day of the week they took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were puzzling over this, behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. They said to them, "Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised. Remember what he said to you while he was still*

*in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day." Luke 24:1-:7*

2. When he rose he had a real physical body, he was not a ghost or a disembodied spirit:

*But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." Luke 24:37-:39*

Also:

*So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." John 20:25-:27*

3. But it was not an ordinary physical body. Jesus could appear and disappear from sight instantly:

*And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Luke 24:30-:31*

And:

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." John 20:19*

NT Wright, an English biblical scholar, and probably one of the smartest men to ever live, says that trying to describe Christ's resurrected body is so hard because we don't have a precise vocabulary for trying to describe this. Nothing like Christ's glorified body had been seen before, and nothing like it has been seen since.<sup>3</sup>

The ability of Jesus to appear and disappear from sight helps us to understand his Ascension into Heaven:

*He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for "the promise of the Father*

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<sup>3</sup> See page 113 of Wright's book "Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense."

*about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy Spirit." When they had gathered together they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He answered them, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven." Acts 1:3-11*

The Ascension isn't about Jesus rising up into the sky like someone with a jet pack on until he rises so high that we can't see him anymore. This is not intended to deny that the bible provides us with an accurate description of what the Ascension looked like to those who witnessed it. I firmly believe in the reliability of this account. But we need to understand that more was going on than just Jesus rising above the earth. It's not as if someone in a helicopter on the other side of the cloud would have been able to see Jesus, "Oh look, I see where he's hiding!" Jesus did rise up from the earth, but there were also much more powerful and mysterious things that Jesus was doing in his resurrected body at this time.

What happened at the Ascension is this. During the period following his resurrection Jesus at times chose to reveal himself to his disciples by appearing in his glorified body. At other times he would suddenly and instantly withdraw himself from their presence in a way that is only possible for someone whose physical body had been transformed in ways that we can not yet fully understand. This is what occurred at the Ascension. Jesus didn't disappear into outer space. He didn't cease to have a physical body. The incarnation of Jesus Christ did not end with the Ascension. Jesus has a body right now. He will always possess this glorified resurrected body. At the Ascension Jesus withdrew from being physically present to his disciples in such a way that after the Ascension they could no longer see him, speak to him, and so on. During this time of withdrawal we wait for what is promised to us in the Nicene Creed. Jesus "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

The Ascension marks the beginning of one age in Church history. A period when we wait for the return of the physically glorified Christ.

### **Our Share in Christ's Resurrection**

We have already discussed how we share with Jesus in experiencing ordinary, real human life. We talked about how one day we will share with him the experience of death. When Jesus comes "again in glory to judge the living and the dead", we will then follow Jesus in having our body and soul reunified and existing forever with a glorified physical body.

The final two lines of the Nicene Creed, which we say at every Sunday mass, are “We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” This reference to the resurrection of the dead isn’t referring to Christ. The Creed takes care of that earlier when we say “On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures.” And the reference to “the life of the world to come” doesn’t just refer to Heaven as it is now a place where souls are separated from their bodies but united to God but to the new creation that will come into being at the end of the world as we know it. At that time those united to God will be reunited with their bodies, glorified bodies like the one Christ has possessed since his resurrection.

When Jesus returns in all his glory we will all rise from the dead:

*Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:28-:29*

And:

*We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-:17*

The bodies we have when we rise from the dead will be very different from the ones we have now. Just as the body Jesus has now is different than the one he had before his crucifixion:

*Not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for human beings, another kind of flesh for animals, another kind of flesh for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the brightness of the heavenly is one kind and that of the earthly another. The brightness of the sun is one kind, the brightness of the moon another, and the brightness of the stars another. For star differs from star in brightness. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown corruptible; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown dishonorable; it is raised glorious. It is sown weak; it is raised powerful. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one. 1 Corinthians 15:39-:44*

Right now we don’t, and can’t, really know what this will be like. Until we witness and experience this our understanding will be very limited, but at the time of the final resurrection we will be even greater insight into this. Verses from the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of St.

John and from St. Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians point us towards the difference between our understanding now, and the eventual understanding that we will have.

*Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2*

*At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12*

### **Our Share in This Before the End of Time**

Our full share of the resurrection of the dead will be ours when the world ends. But we can share in this in real, but limited, ways right now.

*Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4*

*You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And even when you were dead (in) transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions. Colossians 2:12-13*

When we are baptized we share in Christ's death and resurrection. Our baptism is our Paschal mystery. This is why it's not a coincidence that, at the Easter Vigil on the evening of Holy Saturday, baptisms are part of our celebration of Christ's dying and rising. Baptism is the main way in which we participate in what we are celebrating.

But of course our participation in Christ's resurrection is right now very clearly limited. Baptism gives us spiritual life and the forgiveness of sins. It does not give us a glorified resurrection body. Now I can only speak for myself; but I've been baptized and my knee sometimes hurts from running 10 miles a day, I occasionally get slight headaches from spending so much time staring at my computer screen preparing talks and homilies, and earlier this year I had a cough that came and went over the course of a month or so. So I've been baptized but I've still got the same ordinary, defective, doomed-to-break-down-some-day human body I was born with. Baptism unites us to Christ's resurrection, but the benefit we are meant to derive from his resurrection is given to us on the installment plan.

So our sharing in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ is not a one time thing. This work does not end with baptism. Discussing this reality would be another whole session in and of itself so let's just quickly turn to one of St. Paul's letters. This lets us see the reality that we are meant to be constantly dying to sin and becoming more alive to Christ Jesus throughout our whole life:

*But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 2 Corinthians 5:7-:11*

Baptism ushers us into a life of penance and repentance as, God willing, we become more dead to sin and more filled with the life of Jesus Christ within us. This is the work which results from the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. It is a work that is meant to continue to progress throughout our lifetime and that will be brought to completion if we remain united to Jesus Christ and share in the “resurrection of life.” (John 5:29)