

The Feast Has Come

By Bishop George Khodr

“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”. [John 6:54] This does not need much interpretation. Our noble teachers have said that flesh is the self and blood is the life. There is no need for further hermeneutics. Who am I to add anything? No further utterance is needed. Is His body His words? Whenever we understand the philosophy of the good Book we believe in this and we realize what is deeper, that His words were He.

There is no debate in this. The Saints who have interpreted that His body is the offering [namely the offered elements at the Holy Communion], they were right, and whoever has said that it is His teaching they were also right. If His teaching was Himself, then the offering is also Himself. In the mystery of your person, is there any unity between the words of your Gospel and whatever you have called as your body and blood? Whoever knows the depth of God’s thought knows that the talk [of the Lord] about His body and blood is a talk about His self and there is no further talk beyond the talk on His self, until on the Last Day we understand everything.

However, only the intimate ones might understand all this. Make us Lord from those intimate ones, so that I might understand something of Your self. Whenever you graciously forgive our sins we would be given to understand. You have said: “My son, give me your heart.” [Pro. 23: 26] And by that you wanted that we empty the heart from anything other than You, so that understanding might not be hindered.

The Feast comes to the Easterners after few days and we accept it in anticipation of the love since we know that we live through it. We live with the longing that Christ will annihilate our sins, namely with the assurance that victory is coming in us through the promise of the life which is transmitted from Him to us and to the world.

Everything in Christianity is an event and a promise. Faith is faith on a reality which brings you salvation. And reality is partly a past event, which could be historically proven by witnesses. Logically, an event does not need more than a real proof through witnesses and documents. Nevertheless, the New Testament insisted to consider the death of Christ a faith issue, namely that which is more than a historical event. [The historicity of the event] would be asserted by any atheist historian had he / [she] lived at that time. Hence, any claim which negates the death [of Jesus] would not be a historical statement, rather a creedal [doctrinal] position and there is no room [here] to discuss that.

Hence, we do not have to respond to those who claim that He did not die. This would be the case whenever we comport ourselves with the logic of a historical

reality. However, if we do not comport with this logic, then we would need to abandon the historical methodology in order to assume a dogmatic methodology.

In their claim of the death [of Jesus] Christians base their argument on the Roman pagan sources, and they support this argument with their historical documentations, and not merely as part of their dogmas. The Gospel, whether you believe in it or not, as a historical reference from the first century and partly from the beginning of the second century, is a well-established document with the testimonies of the witnesses and their followers, who left their traces to us from that time. Thus, [here is] the difficulty of falsifying the early Christianity [especially that] it has stated incidents evidenced by manuscripts. You cannot prove scientifically that the one whom the disciples met “after resurrection” is the same crucified one, since this is a question of faith. However, if you were educated, and you were not subject to a dogmatic position you cannot deny His crucifixion as a physical event. Hence, [in an attempt to understand resurrection] you will have to rely on what you think is revelation, i.e. an interpretation of a dogmatic text. And then, interpretative texts would be set opposite to other texts which you consider as interpretative.

The essence of Christianity is the belief that the death of Jesus the Nazarene was a physical/[historical] event which occurred under the mandate of Pontius Pilate over Judea about the year thirty-six A.D. About this there is no discussion. The importance of the Christian position, concerning the death of the Nazarene, is in that Jesus the Nazarene’s execution by Pilate does not only depend on the testimony of the Gospels.

The strength of the Christian position, concerning the [historical] reality of the Nazarene’s death, is that it is grounded not in your faith, but in the avowal of the Roman pagan records which indicate this death.

You are free not to accept to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior, since this is not of history. However, you are not free not to accept that He died, unless you take a position which the historical reality does not acknowledge. Christians add to this saying that His death is a question of faith, since they perceive in this death a salvific value.

We do not come to the reality of His death from our faith, but we construct our faith upon the reality of the cross, and it is mentioned in the Roman texts.

Our question with those who do not think as we do is that we are a religion, the reality of which is established in its sources. Yes, reality does not require any kind of faith from you; however, whenever faith does not rely on reality it would be independent completely of history.

We are a religion of which the crucifixion of Jesus the Nazarene is an essential element, His wonders in Palestine and His teachings. Much of this has already become material for historical examination and some of it is object of

[faith] ratification. I say here that the resurrection of the Savior belongs to [faith] ratification, since you cannot prove rationally that the one whom many disciples have met after resurrection is the one actually raised [from the dead]. This belongs to faith. Faith does not oppose science, however it neither originates in science nor does its method resemble the scientific methods.

All faith ratification is in the heart of the believer. This does not mean that faith is irrelevant to the facts. Nevertheless, if faith has no contact with reality it would be the creation of imagination.

From this perspective, what does the resurrection of Jesus the Nazarene mean to us? The Gospels tell that this whom His followers saw, the One who died, is the same who has risen. They do not tell anything else. They do not speak of a revivification of a corpse. They do not describe Jesus' transition from a state of death to a state of life or of resuscitation. They say that this whom you see now alive is the one hanged on a wood. But how this transition, from a state of death to a state of life, has taken place the texts have not mentioned this.

The Gospels were concerned to ascertain that after the complete slaughter of Jesus the Nazarene on the cross, He has appeared alive, He ate and drank and stayed alive and He appeared to His brothers and they touched Him. He inaugurated a new life in the world, and different kind of humans. He willingly has challenged death with amazing courage and with longing toward resurrection. This is possible [however] only through love of Jesus' the Nazarene.

All the journeys of early Christians, and the later ones, indicate that many of the pleasures of the world did not attract them. From all the Roman and the Soviet documents on the martyrs you might see that that which kept Christians alive was greater than death, they carried [within themselves] a mystery which is not possible to explain psychologically. How did they die in the Roman Empire, generation after generation, crushed, and expecting nothing other than an unseen glory? What is the mystery [or the secret] behind their acceptance to live in poverty and remain the beloved ones of the Lord, being exposed to hatred of their persecutors and the mocking of many?

How do beasts eat your meats and you do not wail and your wives tell their children not to weep because of their being preyed upon? All this remained mystery, closed to the minds, until the martyrs, in the voice of Ignatius the Antioch, asked to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts so that they might become "an acceptable sacrifice for Christ".