

Standing by the Cross: Putting on Christ

Fr John Behr

1: Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons to Asia and Phrygia (Eusebius, *H.e.* 5.1.41-2, 45-6)

Blandina, hung on a stake (ἐπὶ ξύλου), was offered as food for the wild beasts that were let in. She, by being seen hanging in the form of a cross, by her vigorous prayer, caused great zeal in the contestants, as, in their struggle, they beheld with their outward eyes, through the sister, him who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe in him that everyone who suffers for the glory of Christ has for ever communion with the living God. ... the small and weak and despised woman had put on the great and invincible athlete, Christ, routing the adversary in many bouts, and, through the struggle, being crowned with the crown of incorruptibility.

...
“Through their continued life the dead were made alive, and the martyrs showed favor to those who had failed to witness. And there was great joy for the Virgin Mother in receiving back alive those who she had miscarried as dead. For through them the majority of those who had denied were again brought to birth and again conceived and again brought to life and learned to confess; and now living and strengthened, they went to the judgment seat.”

2: St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, 6:

It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die. ... Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall become a human being (*anthropos*). Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.

3: St Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 4.26.1

If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures this way, he will find in them the Word concerning Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling. For Christ is the ‘treasure which was hidden in the field’ [Matt. 13:44], that is, in this world – for ‘the field is the world’ [Matt. 13:38] – [a treasure] hidden in the Scriptures, for he was indicated by means of types and parables, which could not be understood by human beings prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted, that is, the advent of the Lord. And therefore it was said to Daniel the prophet, ‘Shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the consummation, until many learn and knowledge abounds. For, when the dispersion shall be accomplished, they shall know all these things’ [Dan. 12:4, 7]. And Jeremiah also says, ‘In the last days they shall understand these things’ [Jer. 23:20]. For every prophecy, before its fulfilment, is nothing but an enigma and ambiguity to human beings; but when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then it has an exact exposition [ἐξήγησις]. And for this reason, when at this present time the Law is read by the Jews, it is like a myth, for they do not possess the explanation [ἐξήγησις] of all things which pertain to the human advent of the Son of God; but when it is read by Christians, it is a treasure, hid in a field, but brought to light by the Cross of Christ, and explained, both enriching the understanding of human beings, and showing forth the wisdom of God, and making known his economies with regard to the human being, and prefiguring the kingdom of Christ, and preaching in anticipation the good news of the inheritance of the holy Jerusalem, and proclaiming beforehand that the human being who loves God shall advance so far as even to see God, and hear his Word, and be glorified, from hearing his speech, to such an extent, that others will not be able to behold his glorious countenance [cf. 2 Cor. 3:7], as was said by Daniel, ‘Those who understand shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and many of the righteous as the stars for ever and ever’ [Dan. 12:3]. In this manner, then, I have shown it to be, if anyone read the Scriptures.

4: Doxastikon at Vespers, Holy Saturday:

Moses the great mystically prefigured this present day, saying: ‘And God blessed the seventh day.’ For this is the blessed Sabbath, this is the day of rest, on which the only-begotten Son of God rested from all his works, through the economy of death he kept the Sabbath in the flesh, and returning again through the resurrection he has granted us eternal life, for he alone is good and loves humankind (lit: loves *anthropos*).

5: Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ* 6.91-4 (6.12 Eng)

It was for the new human being (*anthrōpos*) that human nature was created at the beginning, and for him mind and desire were prepared. ... It was not the old Adam who was the model for the new, but the new Adam for the old. ... For those who have known him first, the old Adam is the archetype because of our fallen nature. But for him who sees all things before they exist, the first Adam is the imitation of the second. To sum it up: the Savior first and alone showed to us the true human being (*anthrōpos*), who is perfect on account of both character and life and in all other respects.

6: St Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies*, 3.22.3:

Hence also was Adam himself termed by Paul ‘the type of the one to come’ (Rom 5:14), because the Word, the Fashioner of all things, prefigured in him the future economy relating to the Son of God on behalf of the human race, God having predetermined the first, the animated human that is, so that he should be saved by the spiritual [one]; for, since the Saviour pre-exists, it was necessary that the one to be saved should also exist, so that the Saviour should not be without purpose.

7: St John of Damascus, Sticheron from Aposticha, Friday Vespers, tone 8; used in funeral service:

I weep and I wail when I think upon death, and behold our beauty, fashioned after the image of God, lying in the tomb, disfigured, dishonored, bereft of form. O marvel! What is this mystery which befalls us? Why have we been given over unto corruption, and why have we been wedded to death? Of a truth, as it is written, by the command of God, who gives the departed rest.

8: St Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61 (*Cosmic Mystery*, 137, 140):

[Christ has] converted the use of death

[so that] the baptized acquires the use of death to condemn sin, which in turn mystically leads that person to divine and unending life.

9: St Irenaeus *Against the Heresies* 3.20.1-2:

God, therefore, was long-suffering when the human being defaulted, foreseeing that victory which should be granted to him through the Word. For when strength was made perfect in weakness [cf. 2 Cor. 12:9], [the Word] showed the kindness and transcendent power of God. For **just as** he did bear Jonah to be swallowed up by the whale, not that he should be swallowed up and perish altogether, but **so that**, having been cast out again, he might be more subject to God and might glorify him the more who had conferred upon him such an un hoped-for salvation and brought a firm repentance to the Ninevites, that they might convert to the Lord who delivered them from death when they were struck with awe by that sign that had been wrought on Jonah ... **so also**, from the beginning, God did bear the human being to be swallowed up by the great whale, who was the author of the transgression, not that he should perish altogether when so engulfed, but arranging in advance the finding of salvation, which was accomplished by the Word, through the ‘sign of Jonah’ [Matt. 12:39-40], for those who held the same opinion as Jonah regarding the Lord, and who confessed, and said, ‘I am a servant of the Lord, and I worship the Lord God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ (Jonah 1.9), **so that** the human being, receiving an un hoped-for salvation from God, might rise from the dead, and glorify God, and repeat, ‘I cried to the Lord my God in my affliction, and he heard me from the belly of hell’ [Jonah 2:2], and that he might always continue glorifying God, and giving thanks without ceasing for that salvation which he had obtained from him, ‘that no flesh should glory in the Lord’s presence’ [1 Cor. 1:29], nor should the human being ever adopt an opposite opinion with regard to God, supposing that the incorruptibility which surrounds him is his own by nature, nor, by not holding the truth, should boast with empty superciliousness, as if he were by nature like to God. (*haer.* 3.20.1)

Such then was the patience of God, that the human being, passing through all things and acquiring knowledge of death, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead, and learning by experience from whence he has been delivered, may thus always give thanks to the Lord, having received from him the gift of incorruptibility, and may love him the more, for ‘he to whom more is forgiven, loves more’ (cf. Luke 7:42-3), and may himself know how mortal and weak he is, but also understand that God is so immortal and powerful as to bestow immortality on the mortal and eternity on the temporal, and that he may also know the other powers of God made manifest in himself, and, being taught by them, may think of God in accordance with the greatness of God. For the glory of the human being is God, while the vessel of the workings of God, and of all his wisdom and power is the human being. (*haer.* 3.20.2)

10: Psalm 103/4:29-31:

“When you take away their breath they die and return to their dust; when you send forth your Spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the Lord endure forever and may the Lord rejoice in his works.”

11: *Letter of Barnabas* 6.9:

The human being is earth that suffers (ἄνθρωπος γὰρ γῆ ἐστὶν πάσχουσα)

12: St Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Romans* 4:

Suffer me to be eaten by the beasts, through whom I can attain to God. I am God’s wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. (*Rom* 4)