



The Medicine of Immortality

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

Man cannot live without the assurance that God is near him in Jesus Christ. His well-being depends on the feeling that the love and power of his Maker and Redeemer is close to him.

Jesus assured His followers He would be with them *"always to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:20). Neither time nor space separate Him from those who receive Him as Lord in faith and obedience.

That Jesus ascended bodily into heaven does not mean He abandoned the world. Rather, *since the day of Pentecost, He abides with all Christians in a new dimension*. The descent of the Holy Spirit brought into being the Church as the Body of Christ. It was made possible for all those who receive Him as Savior and are *"born in water and the Spirit"* to relate to Him not only spiritually, but also even physically.

The Bible tells us that all Christian believers constitute the *"Body of Christ"* (1 Cor. 6:15, 12:27). But I wonder how many of us take this seriously? Are we sufficiently aware of the tremendous meaning of this truth? That the followers of the Gospel make up the Body of Christ is not to be taken only figuratively. This is not stated in Scripture simply as a figure of speech or merely as pious rhetoric.

A Christian is part of Christ's Body in a very literal sense of the word. He becomes united with Him through faith, baptism and the Communion of His Body and Blood. Christ envelops our whole being at baptism. *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:27). He covers our body and soul like a garment. We are

completely wrapped in Him, because He takes control of our whole life.

Our Physical Union with Christ

God can grant us a new body at the second coming of Christ in the likeness of His own resurrection Body only so long as we are in union with His Body here and now. But that union does not come with more faith in an invisible Christ. It must come with an actual physical contact and tangible relationship. In the words of St. Paul: *"What is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power"* (1 Cor. 15:42). Our body will be like His – an incorruptible, glorified, spiritual body. But this requires that the body which is buried in the ground has already been incorporated into His own Body in a literal sense. Only the body that is sown in union with Christ's own Body can be resurrected in glory. It must contain the power of resurrection unto everlasting life.

Christ couldn't make it any plainer: *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:54). This is not allegorical language. Our Lord means what He says. Our body assimilates the Body of Christ in the organic process of eating and digestion. There is no other way to attain physical union with Him. We become what we eat. We become Christ-like and filled with the Holy Spirit, since Christ's

humanity is deified and glorified. He is a heavenly Body, as our body one day will become, if we make His Body our own.

"This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?" They objected. Our Protestant friends come up with the same argument. *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* (John 6:52). Then Jesus answered their objections by affirming in far more explicit and unequivocal terms what He had already stated: *"For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed."* The Lord is dispelling any possible thought that He was attaching a more spiritual meaning to His words. He intends that we take His ordinance literally. He introduces His reaffirmation with the words *"Truly, truly, I say unto you"* in order to emphasize what He is about to say. And this is what He says unambiguously: *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you"* (6:53). And by "life" Jesus always means eternal life.

It is important to remember that the union with Christ which a Christian attains is not simply a spiritual union. He does not relate to Christ only in a spiritual relationship. Rather, he relates to the whole Christ: body and soul. This means that the relationship is physical, as well as spiritual. *"Putting on Christ"* signifies being engrafted into His physical and glorified Body. By dying and rising mystically with Christ in the trine immersion of baptism the believer becomes dead to sin, freed from the bondage of Satan, and identified with Christ in His resurrection glory.

But what is begun at Baptism is consummated with the Communion of the Mystical Supper. The visible union with Christ is completed at the Eucharistic Table. He makes Himself tangible in that Bread which is

His Body. It becomes the physical means of achieving a visible union with Christ and with one another. The Apostle Paul teaches: *“The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one Body, for we all partake of the one bread”* (1 Cor. 10:16).

When God adopts us as His children in Christ, we don't become related to Him in an external manner. We do not look for Him as if He were outside and apart from ourselves. Christ is not outside the community of His brethren. *“That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren”* (Heb. 2:11). Those who claim a common Father share in the same flesh and blood. We are alike not only morally and spiritually, but we are of His flesh and blood. We are related to Christ by blood ties, *“For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin.”*

The Physical Christ Here and Now

In that mystery of human identification with the visible Christ we find the supreme expression of God's love for man. In order to save us the Son of God lowered Himself and condescended out of love to *“partake of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death”* (Heb. 2:14). He assumed human nature to become one like us (except for sin).

“And the Logos became flesh” (John 1:14). This means Christ is the incarnation of the Son of God. In Him dwells the Godhead bodily. He took on human flesh and blood from the Blessed Virgin Mary and became man. When He ascended into heaven, He did not leave His body behind, but took it with Him that it too might be glorified. Je-

sus rose from the dead bodily. His physical appearance was not an apparition. He explicitly said: *“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have”* (Luke 24:39).

But the incarnation of the Son and Logos of God is not simply an event of the past. It did not all end with His glorious ascension into heaven. It remains as an abiding reality in the church, beginning with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Christ is with us physically even today. The Church is the extension of the incarnation. We are His members in a very literal sense of the word. He uses our hands, our feet, our lips to speak to the world and to manifest His love for all men. We look at each other as members of that glorified Body. We see Jesus Christ in each other. Our bodies and members are not our own. They are His. *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”* (1 Cor. 6:15).

If we are Christ's then naturally our body is the *“temple of the Holy Spirit within us which we have from God”* (6:10). It becomes obvious that the Christian is expected to keep his body inviolate and holy, since it is Christ's. To harm it in any way by adultery, fornication or physical abuse is an act of grave sin which can only incur the wrath of God. Who would think of violating Christ's own body? Not even the most vile sinner!

I am trying to point out that Christ is not simply the Redeemer Who died for our sins some two thousand years ago and from the remote past calls men to receive Him spiritually in faith. We can see Him and touch Him, because He has made Himself accessible.

The Reality of the Incarnation in the Eucharist

But our identity with Christ in His human and divine nature must be renewed over and over again, as long as we are still pilgrims on earth and soldiers engaged in the constant battle against Satan. That renewal is achieved each time we partake of the Bread and the Cup which He gives us to receive as His Body and Blood. On the night in which He was betrayed Jesus gave bread to His disciples at the last supper, saying: *“Take, eat; this is my body.”* He also took the Cup and gave it to them, saying: *“Drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins”* (Matt. 26:26).

The divine Body which is broken for us and the divine Blood which is poured out for many at the Communion are not the dead elements of a once living Christ. Not in the least! They are the post-resurrection and post-ascension Body and Blood. They are living, glorified and deified and, as such, are quickening and life-giving. This fact assures us that our own bodies share the here and now in that divine glory the fullness of which will be ours in the last day when we will be snatched away at the moment of the Rapture.

The victory of Christ over death becomes our own victory only because we partake of His Body and Blood. Jesus transfuses His own sacred, royal, and precious Blood into our own blood stream. There are no subjects in His Kingdom. We are all of royal blood. Praise His name! If the *“Logos became flesh and dwelt among us,”* then the whole Christ must become ours to have and to hold as a pledge unto everlasting glory in the kingdom to come.

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Who is the Restrainer?

by Joseph Abbate / President

“For the mystery of iniquity does already work: only he who now restrains will restrain, until he be taken out of the way. And shall that Wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (2nd Thess. 2:7-8). We see that throughout history, God was using a restraining power to prevent the Antichrist from rising to the world stage. However, in God’s timing, He would remove this restraining force. But what exactly is this force? We get insight from some Biblical and historical writings.

A main plan of satan was the destruction of Israel. We can see a number of occasions when Israel had almost been wiped out, its people dispersed, the Temple destroyed and its land occupied, first of all through the Babylonian Empire, as we read in such Old Testament books as 2nd Kings, Jeremiah and Daniel. Another attempt at Israel’s destruction is described in the Book of Esther. Later, Israel would fall to the Romans.

In the year 70 A.D. the Roman armies laid siege to Jerusalem and surrounded the Temple. Roman historians had recorded eye witness accounts of the event: *“A few days after that feast (of the unleavened bread) on the 21st day of the month of Artemisius (April), a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it (the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.) of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding the cities. Moreover, at that last feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner (court of the Temple) as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as*

of a great multitude, saying, ‘let us remove hence’. (Josephus, History of the Jewish Wars).

“There had been seen hosts joining battle in the skies, the fiery gleam of arms, the Temple illuminated by a sudden radiance from the clouds. The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly thrown open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the gods were departing. At the same instant there was a mighty stir as of departure” (Tacitus, The History 5:13). These accounts testify to a divine force departing from the Temple.

We read in the Old Testament, while the prophet Daniel was in fervent prayer, he had received a visitation from the Archangel Gabriel who explained to him: *“for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days, but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia”* (Dan. 10:12-13).

The Archangel Michael is often referred to as the defender of Israel, and in the books of Daniel and Revelation, we can find references to this point. The above Biblical verse describes a battle in the spiritual realm. Often, the end result is a shift of power in regards to the rise and fall of empires. In this scripture we see the shift in power go from Persia to Greece: *“now I will return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Greece shall come. But I will show thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth; and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince”* (Dan. 11:20-21).

The Archangel Michael is once again shown fighting for the people of Israel. This time against the Antichrist: *“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince*

which standeth for the children of thy people” (Dan. 12:1). *“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought against his angels”* (Rev. 12:7). The great Archangel Michael is pictured as a restraining agent against Satan and his forces. We can also see God’s restraint withdrawn from the Eastern Roman Empire centuries later.

During the siege of Constantinople in 1453, we have other eyewitness accounts from both Christian and Ottoman forces in regards to a mystical, yet visible force seen leaving the Church of Hagia Sophia. In the words of a captured Russian monk named Nestor Iskander, who had witnessed the amazing event while in the Turkish camp: *“On the top of the window, a large flame was trailing to the outside and surrounded the dome of the church for quite some time. After that, it flew towards the sky. Those who had seen the phenomenon became numb and began to lament and shout in Greek: “Lord have mercy! The light itself has risen to the sky!”* (The Tale of Constantinople).

George Sphrantzes, who was within the city during the siege, who also served on the Byzantine Imperial Court wrote: *“Shining light was descending from the sky and was covering the city for the whole night”*. It is recorded that Sultan Mehmed, who was ready to end the siege, gained encouragement after the light departed and decided on a final assault on the city.

We cannot undervalue the impact of Rome’s fall. In the eyes of the citizens of the Roman Empire, any land outside the Empire was seen as barbarian and uncivilized. Rome represented a culture of law and order. To many of the early Church Fathers, the Roman Empire was viewed as the “Restraining” power described in 2nd Thessalonians. After Rome established Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, it was also seen as the defender of the

Christian faith.

However, this restrainer, (Rome) had to be removed from the scene before the rise of the Antichrist. Many early Church Fathers taught this. St. Irenaeus 130-202 A.D.: *“John and Daniel have predicted the dissolution and desolation of the Roman Empire, which shall precede the end of the world and eternal Kingdom of Christ”* (The Ante Nicene Fathers vol. 1, St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, chap XXVI).

Tertullian 160-220 A.D.: *“He who now hinders must hinder until he be taken out of the way. What obstacle is there but the Roman State; the falling away of which being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist..... And then shall be revealed that wicked one”* (On the Resurrection of the flesh, Ante Nicene Fathers, 1978 edition, vol. 3, p. 563).

St. Jerome 347-420 A.D.: *“Says the Apostle, unless the Roman Empire should first be desolated, and Antichrist proceed, Christ will not return”*

St. Ambrose 340-397 A.D.: *“After the falling or decay of the Roman Empire, Antichrist shall appear”* (Thomas Newton, Dissertation on the Prophecies P. 463).

St Cyril of Jerusalem 313-386 A.D.: *“But this aforesaid Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman Empire shall have been fulfilled”* (Catechetical Lectures, section 15, on 2nd Thessalonians 2:4, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, vol. VII).

St. John Chrysostom 349-407 A.D.: *“When the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he (Antichrist) shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exalt himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the monarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God”* (Homily IV on 2nd Thessalonians 2:6-9, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, vol. XIII).

One may then assume that the Antichrist would have already been revealed by this time, since historians claim the Roman Empire officially fell in the year 476 A.D. Many

people forget about the Eastern half of the Empire or Byzantine Empire. Emperor Constantine had moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople, which had not fallen until 1453. Yet, even after the fall of Constantinople, the Holy Roman Empire which was established under the reign of Charlemagne lasted until 1806. Charlemagne had officially been crowned “Emperor of the Romans” by Pope Leo III in 800 A.D. After its demise, the Holy Roman Empire had been carried on by the Austro-Hungarian Empire which lasted all the way until it had been defeated by the Allied forces in World War 1. The royal crest of the Austro Hungarian Empire had even continued to carry the Byzantine 2 headed eagle. After the fall of the Byzantines, a common saying in Russia was: **“Two Romes have fallen, the third shall not fall.”** The Russian rulers, who had continued the Orthodox Christian faith from the Byzantine Empire, had carried the official title of Tsar (Caesar) until Nicholas the 2nd had been killed with his family by the Communists in 1918. So, we can see that remnants of the Roman Empire were still in existence until just over 100 years ago. Not a very long time at all, when placed within a historical timeline.

Can the remaining pieces of the Roman Empire under the current European Union be the fulfillment of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as recorded in the Book of Daniel? Many current Bible scholars say yes. If this is the case, then the rise of the Antichrist may be soon. Yet, the question remains, what is currently “restraining” his appearing? The answer may be the remnants of the Roman Empire who settled in America. After all, it was mostly European peoples who had established America and fended off the evils of Fascism during World War 2 and Communism during the Cold War. However, we can see America’s decline happening at a blistering speed.

Some modern Christian teachings hold the position that the “restrainer” is none other than the Church. Meaning that when the Church is taken out of the way through the rapture, then the Antichrist can reveal himself. However, we cannot historically find

this. In fact, we have seen Christian communities wiped out on a massive scale. In 17th Century, the Japanese Shoguns killed nearly a tenth of its own population who were Christian. Millions of Christians have been killed in the Middle East by the Ottoman Empire all the way up to 100 years ago during the Asia Minor Disaster. It continues in Syria, Iran and Iraq. Communist regimes have killed countless Christian communities in Africa up to the present day. One reason for the early European settlers into America were to escape religious persecutions. As the end of the age draws closer, religious persecutions may arise in the future.

Once again, the early Church wrote on the subject of persecution in the end times such as Tertullian and St. Irenaeus (Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, The Ante Nicene Fathers, vol. III, p. 563). (St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, The Ante Nicene Fathers Vol. 1, Chap. XXVI). Space does not permit me to quote further. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Church had never been interpreted as the “restrainer” as described in 2nd Thessalonians. Such interpretation is a rather new innovation.

There is, however, no doubt that America has played a major role in restraining the forces of evil in the past. So, the question remains, does this mean that America may be the current form which God is using to restrain the Mystery of Iniquity’s final fruition? If so, then, unfortunately, there are a number of ways America may be “taken out of the way”, such as financial collapse, natural disasters, war, internal strife or plague. Sadly, a number of these things have already been seen.

With our Nation’s debt levels now exceeding an astounding 30 trillion dollars, our country has never faced such a pending financial crisis. The recent geological concerns of the massive Yellowstone volcano, or the Cascadia Subduction Zone, has raised fears of massive earthquakes or tsunamis. We have recently witnessed a growing disdain for our country and the founding Christian principals. It no longer takes a vivid imagination to ponder on what type of events can take place in our world.