

Glorify Your Son!

I think Jesus' language in today's Gospel is on the point of breaking under the weight of his meaning, and this is as it should be. The task of conveying what God is like is formally impossible for human words and thoughts, and it's where we *feel* this that the inexpressible truth is as close as it can get to being told. Of course, we are most at home when we can easily understand things; but we're at our most tedious and uncreative as well. If Einstein had clung to what he could understand, he might have been a jolly chap down the pub, but he'd never have been the scientist he became. If Beethoven had gone on composing his First Symphony for the rest of his life we would have a poor idea of heroic music. However, religion is where this pattern is most vital. If our religion is a weekly static rehearsal of old truths, it is dead - and it deserves to be.

A (Small) Bit Of Theology

The Second Person of the Holy Trinity is equal to the Father, and with the Father he breathes forth the divine Spirit, so that they eternally glorify each other with divine honour; without end or beginning they pour out divine love, generating and generated and participating in each other. This eternal self-giving is put forth into the world when the Son becomes human; he comes in obedience-to-the-Father, and empties himself of his divine glory so as to enter into time and place, and be what we are. In this amazing projection of the Divine into humanity, the Father is still the Eternal Father, generating his Son; and the Son goes on receiving life from the Father, but not just eternally: breath by breath, day by day, he receives life as a human being; for the first time, a *human* nature is fully possessed by the eternal life of the Son of God. Jesus could say with unique authority: *the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. Yet Jesus still possessed something which stopped those who met him in their tracks: his humanity remained completely open to the Father's love and guidance, to the Holy Spirit. When you meet a very holy person, you sense that openness, and the joy and peace it carries with it, and the awesome power that it makes available. Jesus had this, but absolutely: as the theologians put it, *he was without sin*, he put nothing in the way of the kindness of God. So he lived his life in the shadowed, fallen human world, but without

any trace of shadow between himself and his Father. That complete holiness was possible for Jesus because it was obedient to his own eternal nature. It's *supernatural* for us, but it was *natural* for him. We struggle feebly, to reach for holiness; without supernatural grace we would fail. He struggled too - because he shared our weak nature; but he struggled powerfully, having his indefectible Sonship to guide him.

We Condemned Him To Death

When we sent him to death for claiming this divine equality with the Father, we expressed clearly our real belief: that human nature could not be made divine. Our charge, *You are only a man, and you claim to be God* has a subtext of despair about what it means to be "only" human. The punishment we gave him was this: to be made inhuman, a crucified man, rubbed out from the human record. We took from him, in that sentence and its execution, everything human we could get hold of; the rolling of dice for his clothes is very eloquent. It was as if we said: *what is there left of you now? Where, now, is your talk of being the Son of God? You're not even a human being!* From that place, where we tried our best to make him into nothing, that he prays to the Father for his glory to be restored to him. The one we made utterly poor prays for God's favour; the one we condemned to death calls for eternal life; the one nobody knows or wants to know calls on the One who knows him with divine wisdom.

Moment Of Revelation

All that is required is that the Father should reveal Jesus as his Son; because *the Son of God* is glorious already. Jesus reveals himself as the Son, by the obedience with which he goes to die. In the Garden he said *I AM HE!* and no-one could lay hands on him. But still he gave himself into our hands in obedience to the Father. His prayer before the Passion is in perfect keeping with that understanding: *Father, glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you*. The Son is always glorified by the Father; Jesus is only praying to be himself. Is this the model of perfect prayer for us too? That we should pray to be ourselves, in loving obedience to our Father; that we should help all others to be themselves, in the same loving obedience, so that God may love us all?
Fr Philip