

**And When He Saw Him,  
He Passed by On the Other Side**

This is a unique sentence in the Bible by which it was described the reaction of both the priest and the Levite when they passed by the man who was stripped of his clothing, wounded, and left half dead on the road. Actually, this reaction of them is classified under what the psychologists call *Professional Apathy* or *Compassion Fatigue*. It is defined as a state in which enter those who work in professions that deal directly with human suffering, be it physical or psychological. Examples of these people are physicians, nurses, and psychotherapists. It is well known that the one who works in such professions starts his professional life with a lot of zeal, empathy, compassion and good understanding of the sufferings of the people he is required to help. But, by time, he gradually becomes desensitized regarding their pain and agony and his emotions towards them dry up. This is shown in reluctance, indifference, routine responses, passivity, and sometimes things reach the degree of abusing clients, shouting at their face and rebuking them for their repeated complaints.

Naturally, priests and servants fall under this category because they deal with human suffering on all its levels almost every day. They are required daily to serve people who are subjected to the most tragic life events like chronic and terminal illnesses, killing, martyrdom, rape, natural disasters ...etc. The priest in the first years of his ministry is usually full of zeal, enthusiasm, and vitality, but by time, as his ears become filled with complaints and groaning which he almost hears nothing but them every day, he gradually starts to lose his positivity and zeal, and begins to deal with people's needs and problems with a mechanical dry way void of compassion and empathy. Hence, the served person turns from being "a suffering human being" into a "titled case": this is a case of conversion, this one is a case of separation, that one is a case of addiction...etc

**Among the many signs of *Professional Apathy* are the following:**

- 1) Visible change in the priest's ability to empathize with the ones he serves.
- 2) Dryness and bluntness of emotions towards the served people that may amount sometimes to the degree of cruelty of heart.
- 3) Boredom, grumbles and complaints from service.
- 4) Reluctance and foot-dragging regarding the tasks one is required to perform at service.
- 5) Escaping from people he serves, and intended ignoring to answer not only the phone calls of those who call asking for help but also the phone calls of other priests. Sometimes, the priest even turns off his phone for the entire day to avoid the headache of nagging.
- 6) Serving on the level of "minimal requirements" in order to keep things going and to avoid being blamed. Such a priest never tastes the sweetness of the service of the "second mile".
- 7) Rigid holding upon the geographical boundaries of one's service. If the priest finds out that the person asking for help belongs to another church or live in a place outside the geographical contexts of his service, then he immediately refers him to the priest of the church in which he prays.

Actually, this serious illness that affects many priests has a huge negative impact not only on his service but also on his own personal life. As the priest allows indifference and cruelty to insinuate into his heart, he is not aware that by doing that he give them authority over his entire being. By time, they turn from being mere temporary reactions of him to become fixed clear traits of his personality. Of course, these negative traits that a priest acquires to himself expand to affect his own relationships with his wife and children which become generally characterized with coldness and Luke warmness.

### **What is the remedy?**

- 1) A priest must continuously remind himself that while he serves the afflicted people he is actually serving the afflicted Christ in them. Therefore, his tender mercy remains always kindled and effective.
- 2) *“To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little”* (Luke 7:47). Therefore, it is impossible for a priest, who puts his sins before his eyes with all humbleness and gratitude to God who forgave them all, to deal with those he serves with cruelty and indifference.
- 3) *“Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard”* (Proverbs 21:13); *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12); *“With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given”* (Mark 4:24). Meditation on such scriptural passages helps the priest to restore his first zeal in service and to instill God’s fear in his heart.

## **Our Resurrection**

Our Lord Jesus Christ’s death has clearly pronounced the dissolution of the power of death. Jesus Christ was killed and He died. However, death could not get hold of Him. As it is written, *“whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it”* (Acts 2:24).

In his seventh homily on the Holy Book of Acts, St. John Chrysostom commented that Jesus Christ Himself allowed for His death to take place. Death approached Him like the ferocious labor pain or the pangs of suffering; but He rose as if He had died at all (Exposition of the Holy Book of Acts, Homily #7).

Jesus Christ is the everlasting life; and therefore through His death He disqualified and disarmed death; and His descent to Hades was the greatest proclamation and announcement of life. As a matter of fact, His descent to Hades converted death into life.

During the process of separation of the body from the soul, Jesus Christ’s soul was fully charged with the power of the Godhead. After His Resurrection, it returned back and united with His undefiled body which had not undergone the natural inevitable death incurring process of decomposition.

Through the disobedience of the first Adam, an inherent disposition to death was ushered in into the human nature. On the other hand, through the second Adam, the inherent dormant potential of everlasting life rose and shone again, causing “the impossibility of death” to spring on the platform

of reality. As St. Paul says, "*For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive*" (1 Corinthians 15:21-22), thus revealing the strong, enduring nature of mankind and the human entity which could not be torn up completely by the natural death.

### The Early Fathers Explanation of the Mystery of Life and Death

#### St. Gregory of Nyssa

St. Gregory of Nyssa says that after the natural death the separation of the human body from the soul is not an absolute or entire separation. Jesus Christ's death proved and confirmed this fact because it was just like a lying down or sleep. The litany prayer of the departed expresses the idea in these words, "for there is no death for Your servants, but a departure" (Litany of the Departed, Vesper Prayers).

However, the existence of death has not yet been completely annihilated; but only the destruction of its power has been manifested. Our Lord Jesus Christ had died truly, but the power of His Resurrection was professed even in His death. In addition, this power of the Resurrection is potentially present in the second death of all human beings. There is a big similarity between the death of our Lord Jesus Christ and that of the wheat grain which would not live without first dying beneath the ground, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain*" (John 12:24).

After the Lord Jesus Christ had referred to the hour of His death, the glory of God was revealed in Jesus Christ's death as heard in the voice saying, "*Father, glorify Your name.*" Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "*I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.*" (John 12:28).

The death of the incarnated body of our Lord Jesus Christ has shortened the gap between death and resurrection. St. Paul expressed this fact saying, "*It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*" (1 Corinthians 15:44). In Jesus Christ's death, that hidden secret growth took place in three days only.

St. Gregory of Nyssa insists on the mutually reciprocated relation between the cross and the Resurrection. For, the Resurrection is not a mere outcome; but the fruit of the death on the Cross. St. Gregory stresses the special importance of two points: the first point refers to the unity of the divine hypostasis whereby the soul and body (of the incarnated Jesus Christ) were united together even when separated from each other by death (with regard to the unity of the Godhead with each separately during their split from each other). The second point is Jesus Christ's total purity from sin. St. Gregory reiterates, "As our nature continues in its journey proceeding in Christ to the stage of the separation of the soul from the body, it will have its elements reunited again in the public resurrection whereby it will have them glued back as if with the glue of the divine power of Christ tying back again what has been previously separated never to be split again. This is the Resurrection or the inseparable unity of the elements that prepared for the initial grace that once shrouded humanity at the beginning of creation. We will return to the everlasting life when evil dissipates after having once got mingled with the human nature and brought about the severity between the body and soul. For, just as the element of death started from one man and through him it crept to cover all humanity, likewise in the same way the resurrecting element extends from the One Man Jesus Christ to all the human race. This is the mystery of God's economy concerning His death and Resurrection from the dead" (Homilies #17 for the Catechumens).

## St. Athanasius the Apostolic

In his book "Incarnation of the Word", St. Athanasius says, "Christ did not leave His body dead for a long time. As soon as His body contracted death, He arose it on the third day thus granting victory over death, that is to say conquering corruption and pain in and through His body" (Incarnation of the Word, 26). With these words, St. Athanasius showed the quality of Jesus Christ's death as victorious and granting Resurrection. In this three day death, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was proven to be a glorious body shrouded with power and light. Thus the wheat seed of His parable has grown and the Lord rises from the dead as a bridegroom coming forth from His room. All this took place with the power of His Godhead; and with the power of God the same scenario will take place on the last day. Through His Resurrection, the incarnation has accomplished the proclamation of its victory and the grafting of eternal life within the human nature.

Our Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection is victory not just over His death but over death in its totality.

However, rising with Jesus Christ did not include everyone; and death still has its hold over the earthly body of mankind. The fact of the matter is that despair has ceased and death has lost its effect and gave the power of Resurrection to the human nature. St. Paul clarifies this truth by saying, "*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen*" (1 Corinthians 15:13,16).

St. Paul means that Jesus Christ's Resurrection would be meaningless if it did not extend to include everyone. The human body was implied in Jesus Christ's the head. In addition, faith in Jesus Christ would have been lost or become void with no avail or value, "*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Without hope in the Resurrection faith in Jesus Christ would be aimless, "*But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

## St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom says, "It is true that we still die just as before. But the difference is that we do not remain in death any more. The power of death and its reality is as such: a dead person does not have the power of returning back to life. But, if it is within his capacity to be renewed after death, and be granted a better life. Then his death will not be death but simply repose" (The Holy Book to the Hebrews, Homily 17:2).

This same understanding is found with St. Athanasius who says "the judgment of death has been nullified and through the grace of the Resurrection, the spread of corruption has been stopped and pushed away completely. From now on our bodies will decompose but only for a brief time due to the tendency of our mortal bodies just like the seeds that are thrown on the ground. For, we will not be lost but will live and be resurrected again. With the grace of the Savior death has been abolished."

This is the healing and renewal of nature that depends on the Resurrection and renewal of everyone from now and forever. Every separation of body from its soul is for a short time. The darkness of Hades will be dissipated by the power of the life-giving Cross.

In another text, St. Gregory clarifies this concept by likening it to the "broken reed" that has been split from top to bottom and will by necessity acquire unity when the two parts are glued together

again from top to bottom; and so “all the broken reeds will become perfectly united. ” In the same way is the unity of the soul with the body in Jesus Christ. That is to say that “all the human nature that has been severed into two,” will return and acquire once again the unity between the body and soul through hope in the Resurrection which institutes oneness between the split parts.

In Adam our nature was split into two parts because of sin; but in Jesus Christ that division was cured completely. This therefore is the blocking of death and the propensity towards death.

In other words, this is the strong return to the fullness and perfection of the human existence. It is bringing back life to all the human race, the so called “the new creation”. It is the new revelation of God’s love, His power and perfective act of creation.