06 - The Divinity of Christ

How do we know that Jesus is God?

In the fullness of time

“But in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons,” St. Paul teaches in Galatians 4:4-5. Christ came to earth to redeem us from sin and to make us sons of God, or as St. Peter calls it, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). But who is this Jesus Christ who has done this? In our earlier lesson, we discussed the proofs that Christ was divine. Now let us examine what is implied by saying things like Christ is “divine,” the “Son of God,” and “the Word made flesh.”

The Incarnation

In theology, we call the act of God becoming man the “Incarnation,” from the Latin incarnationem (the act of being made flesh). The Incarnation is the act of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity assuming human nature in the womb of Mary and coming to the earth as a true man. As man, He loses none of His divinity but rather chooses to cloak it, or as St. Paul says, he “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7).

*“The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth of faith against the heresies that falsified it.”*

*-CCC 464*

In order to explain the person of Christ, one has to speak with precision. In the first few centuries of the Church, the great ecumenical councils developed a very specialized language to speak about the mysteries of the Incarnation. The standard definition of what Christ was formulated at the Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and

Chalcedon (451). The traditional formula is that Christ is one Person with two Natures, one human and one divine. Each nature has its own will (a human will and a divine will), both of which are in perfect harmony. He is neither part-God, part-man, nor is His manhood lost in His divinity, nor did His divinity come upon Him later in life and take up His humanity. Rather, He is fully-God and fully-man from the first moment of His conception in the womb and remains so even now at the right hand of the Father.

It is important to get it right on who Christ is, or else none of the rest of the Church’s dogmas will make sense. Let’s define out terms:

*Understanding what Christ is – in so far as a beginning of understanding may be made here below – is essential to understanding what He does.*

*Christ is one Person in two natures (Trinity is three Persons in one Nature).*

*Nature: What are you? – Nature determines what you are capable of*

*Person: Who are you? – Person does the actions.*

*Example: As to my nature, I am a human being and everything natural to humanity is natural to me, because I myself am a human. That human being which is me is not just a nature (i.e., my mother did not give birth to a nature, but to a person) but an individual person who is conscious and subject of his own actions. The person is my individuality, the “I” that thinks, feels, acts and makes decisions. It is what I refer to when I say “me,” “myself,” and “I.”*

Hypostatic Union

While certain actions and sayings of Christ reflect one or the other of the two natures (when Christ says He is thirsty or hungry, this clearly reflects the human nature while His saying that He is “one with the Father” reflects the divine nature), the natures are joined in such a way that whatever Christ did by virtue of His divinity is also asserted of His humanity and what He does by virtue of His humanity is also asserted of His divinity . This reality is called the “hypostatic union”, which means the union of the two natures in one person. Thus, because Christ is God, it is right to say that God worked as a carpenter in Nazareth 2,000 years ago or to say that God died on the Cross. Likewise, because Christ is also man, it is right to say that a man atoned for sin and rightfully receives divine worship. Nevertheless, when we make these statements, we do not separate the two natures but always realize and acknowledge that it is not as God alone that He works miracles nor as man alone that He works as a carpenter in Nazareth (as if His natures could be separated), but that all He does He does as the God-Man by virtue of the hypostatic union.

*“Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity; “like us in all things but sin”. He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (prosopon) and one hypostasis.”*

*-Council of Chalcedon (c. 451)*

In the early Church, it was not Christ’s divinity that was challenged but His manhood. This was the case with one of the earliest heresies, Gnostic Docetism, which was condemned by St. John the Apostle in I John 4:1-3: “Beloved, test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God.” The Docetists, while acknowledging Jesus as God, denied that He was also true man (i.e., that He had “come in the flesh”) and believed that He only appeared to be a man.

It is important to note that Jesus’ human nature was not ***absorbed*** by the divine (the error many sects influenced by the New Age movement make today). The Monophysites thought the humanity of Christ was absorbed by His divinity, like a drop of water is lost in the sea. This, too, is false: Christ retained His manhood and still retains it even now; indeed, without His manhood, His death on the cross would have been to no avail, as we will show.

Many heresies also denied Christ’s true divinity, the most famous of which was the heresy of the Arians, which raged in the Church for over two hundred years (c. 300-500). Arianism denied that Christ was truly God in the same way as God the Father, and instead posited Him as a lesser being, a sort of demi-God who was created. “There was a time when the Son was not” was the creed of the Arians. This view was condemned by the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

Arianism, however, has again reared its ugly head in the modern world. Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons (two of the fastest growing sects in the world) and liberal Protestantism all assert a kind of modified Arianism where the divinity of Christ and His equality in nature with the Father are denied.

Jesus the Christ was a real person who actually existed

*This point can be established with certainty thanks to the witness of pagan authors and above all of the Gospels, which are historic documents.*

*The Jewish Antiquities, a historical work edited in Rome by the Jewish (non-Christian) historian Flavius Josephus between 93 and 94:“During that time, there was Jesus who was a wise man (...) Some of the principals of our nation having accused him before Pilate, he had him crucified” (Ant. Iud. B.18 ch. 4).*

*Suetonius (~ A.D. 69-125) reported that the Emperor Claudius (10 B.C.- A.D. 54) “expelled from Rome the Jews who had become, under the influence of Chrestus, a permanent cause of disorder” (Vita Claudii, 25:4).*

*The repressive measures taken by Claudius are also confirmed by the Acts of the Apostles: Saint Paul encountered in A.D. 52, in Corinth, a Jewish household that had been expelled from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2).*

*There are several other sources that clearly tell of a Jesus or Christ who was executed and formed a following, such as Tacitus (~ A.D. 116) and Pliny the Younger (A.D. 111).*

Most of our knowledge about Jesus Christ comes to us through the four Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament.

We have an abundance of ancient copies of the New Testament due to the fact that each Church community had to have their own text.

The different manuscripts are in substantial agreement: the critics are unanimous in agreeing that no other manuscript from antiquity enjoys such a textual validity.

The Evangelists do not present the life of Jesus in terms of a modern biography; as a good teacher, Jesus repeated His teachings in order to burn them into the memory of His listeners

*Jesus is the Christ, or Hebrew Messiah, sent by God.*

*The entire Old Testament is a preparation of the Hebrew people for the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One (in Greek, Christos or Christ)*

*Jesus fulfills the coming of the Messiah*

*Gen 49:10, Mal 3:1, Daniel 9:24-27, Is 11:1, Is 7:14, Mic 5:2, Is 40:3, Is 35:4-6, and many others.*

*Jesus shares attributes with the God of the Jews – God’s Wisdom:*

*It was admired by the doctors of the Temple when Jesus was only twelve years old (cf. Lk 2:47).*

*The crowds were enchanted by the words that came from His mouth (cf. Lk 4:22): No man ever spoke like this man (Jn 7:46).*

*Jesus shares attributes with the God of the Jews – God’s Sanctity:*

*His charity towards His neighbor, His piety, His humility, His separation from the material goods of this world, His chastity*

*Jesus shares attributes with the God of the Jews – God’s control over the material world – miracles:*

*Too many to mention, and one important one: His own Resurrection from the dead*

The testimony of Jesus Himself

Jesus Christ called Himself “Lord” and “Son of God” in the full sense of these words.

Jesus Christ called God His Father and said that He was equal to the Father.

Jesus Christ attributed to Himself perfection and power that God alone possesses.

*Bible references:*

*Jn Chapter 1 – the Word was God*

*Jn:4-15 - glory of Father's only Son, full of grace and truth Jn 8:19 - if you knew me, you would know my Father In 8:58-59 - I assure you, before Abraham was, I AM In 10:30-33 - the Father and I are one (See Ex 3:14, 20:7, Lev 19:12,24:14-16)*

*Jn 10:38 - the father is in me and lam in the Father In 12:45 - whoever sees me sees the one who sent me Jn: 14:8-12 - whoever has seen has seen the Father*

*Jn:20:28 - Jesus accepts Thomas's "my Lord and my God" Col 2:9 - in him dwells whole fullness of deity bodily Acts 20:28 - church of God he acquired w/ his blood Eph 1:7 - in him we have redemption by his blood I in 1:7 - blood of his Son Jesus cleanses from all sin Tit 213 - glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*

Jesus was either:

1. insane and belonged in a hospital – He claimed to be God

2. God – He claimed to be God

Jesus could not be:

1. a good moral teacher only – He claimed to be God

2 a voice among many true voices – He said He was the only Son of the Father

3. an historical figure blown out of proportion by His followers – all 11 Apostles died hideous deaths holding to the truth of Jesus

4. a fictional character – too many good historical references

*Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said, “I am the Son of God”? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father (Jn 10:36-38).*