



The Only Begotten Son

Only-begotten Son and Word of God, You are immortal, and You willed for our salvation to be made flesh of the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, and without change You became man. You were crucified, O Christ our God, and trampled death by death. You are one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us.

Rarely in these pages do I share something personal. I am a child of the '60s music, therefore I like to sing. I do so privately because my singing offends anybody with hearing. In my car with '60s music playing, I may sing along or when I go in a store or the woods, I sing to myself. My two favorite songs to sing are the Trisagion and the *Monogenes*. (Only-Begotten Son) The latter is part of the liturgy, for the catechumens (those people studying to be initiated into the Church). By its regular singing, there is a good hope that we will remember it. So, when theological questions arise, we have these two sources that may answer any particular question.

We usually use the term "symbol of faith" only when referring to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In the ancient Greek world, there was a practice where a coin would be broken in half and shared between two people. Each would go their own way, carrying their piece of the coin. When they came back to each other, and though they may have no longer been recognizable to each other, the matched coin showed that they were truly one. This coin was called a *symbol*, and an essential aspect of its representation was that it was a sign of participation in the life of another. The two parties in a symbol of faith were the individual and God. When they joined together as in the liturgy or in the Eucharist, they shared their lives with each other. When we sing the hymn, it is our crying out to the transcendent

God. The words of the hymn remind us of the presence, the power, and the identity of the divinity.

It was common during the formation of our liturgical life to use these verbal symbols, which we usually combined with gestures. Initially, this hymn was sung as people, especially catechumens, joined together in the church. As we made our way, wanting to be with God, we sang out a hymn, describing how the Son came into the world, so that we might be saved. And in the Church, salvation is present especially to the catechumens if it is the time that they will continue after the liturgy part for them to be initiated through the sacred mysteries. We are journeying to church in response to the divine invitation. This was the plan of God from the beginning to bring all people to himself, and it was accomplished through a divine initiative.

At the time of St Cyprian of Carthage, the term *symbolon* was used to mean a sacramental right, like baptism, and also a confessional formula, like the creed. In Cyril of Jerusalem's *Mystagogical Catechesis*, he sees the candidate turning from the West, the realm of Satan and darkness, to the East, the realm of the light of God. He saw this as once again and for the first time the Eschatological reopening of Paradise. Eusebius sees the sacraments as images of the heavenly reality. John Chrysostom declares that the symbols of our covenant with God are fulfilled in baptism, in which death and burial, life, and resurrection occur simultaneously. In his catechetical lectures, he recalls our Lord's rising from the baptismal waters, a symbol of the resurrection. He speaks of the water and blood that came from Christ's side as the symbol of baptism and the Eucharist.

These symbols, which we use, are participative. By

participate in the death and resurrection because these symbols become present and accessible to us. Just as the activity of the Holy Spirit in the divine liturgy allows the community of faith to participate directly in the historical event, which is the object of their faith.

A symbol of faith must be consistent with the teachings of scripture. The creed became part of the divine liturgy in the 5th century. According to Theophanes the Confessor, *Monogenes* was composed by Emperor Justinian in 535 or 536. Its purpose was to reconcile the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites into a doctrinal unity leading to political harmony. This hymn would agree with the 5th century third ecumenical council, which said "One of the Trinity was crucified according to the flesh." Juan Mateos notes that by the 9th century, it became part of the antiphons where it is today. It usually follows the third antiphon and precedes the Trisagion, which is a choral celebration of the crucified and exalted divine word of God.

The *Monogenes* is consistent with the scriptural teachings of St Paul's letter to the Philippians 2: 6-11 which may have been the oldest Christological hymn: Who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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