

**Jesus the God Man** Bible Exploration and Appreciation Incarnation and Transformation Part 3 Adult Formation/Spiritual Life May 22, 2003 7:30 p.m.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gifts of manifold wisdom. And we ask you to help us to listen tonight and share our own thoughts and insights with one another and grow through this experience. And we ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

When this whole thing started, a parishioner wrote me some questions, and I said, "Well, they won't be answered until the last night." And he said, "That's all right." Well, I'm not sure they are even going to be answered tonight, but I am going to attempt to answer them.

**Question:** He writes, "When we consider the attributes that are attributed to God, one might ask, '**Does God make decisions?**' It wouldn't seem to be necessary for God to need to make decisions. Decision-making belongs to the temporal order, to free-willed finite humans." Then he tells a personal story.

**Answer:** What I would say about that is **God does make decisions, but not in time.** God's decisions are **eternal decisions**, but his decisions create time and space. **Creation is a decision of God** to extend his love and power beyond himself for reasons that we cannot even guess. So in that way I would say God makes decisions, but not the way we do.

Nor do angels. Angels make decisions too, but not the way we do. **In an angel a decision is all encompassing.** That's why they're never allowed to make a mistake. They've chosen once for all whether they're going to follow God or not. Now how do we understand that? We can't because we don't live in their dimension. We live in a temporal dimension. We make decisions, partial decisions, constantly. They are cumulative, but they are partial. We can change our minds. We can alter the course of our lives. Angels cannot do that.

**God also cannot change his mind** in the sense that his eternal will is his eternal will. However, in the Bible you will see that God is often pictured as changing his mind due to prayer. This is looking at life through a human perspective. It seems that God responds to our prayers. In fact, I can say for sure God responds to our prayers; therefore it might seem to some that God is changing his mind. However, we have to realize that **God always anticipates our prayers.** It's a little bit hard for us to get into this; it's beyond our mind, really, to get to it. Look at it this way: it has to do with praying for people who are dead. If you pray for people who are dead, is this only going to help them now? Well, what is now for them? Don't you think it would be better if your praying for the dead would help them when they are still living? Why not for God? **If you want to think of time as a wheel, God is at the center, not at all influenced with the passage of time.** These are very speculative thoughts, but I mean that's the way I would answer

it. Others would answer differently. I don't think anyone has a corner on the market of speculating.

**Question:** “God, as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, assumed a human nature and experienced death but never relinquished his divinity, in life or in death. ‘He was a man like us in all things except sin,’ which is not an insignificant difference. After ‘He ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father,’ it would seem that he now has a twofold presence in heaven: the eternal divine presence and a resurrected human presence, the manner of presence in the Holy Eucharist—body, blood, soul and divinity. While on earth, it seems that Jesus used his human will to heal people. ‘I will it.’ At his ascension Jesus said, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’ **Do you suppose that he meant to continue to use the will of his human nature in heaven?”**

**Answer:** I would say absolutely, **yes!** Furthermore, we have to say that the assumption of the human nature by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is irreversible, and it's not possible for God to relinquish his divinity because, as we tried to explain before, who is Jesus? Jesus is God, the Second Person; therefore **he can never not be who he is!** Does that make sense? Okay, those are his questions. Do you want to add to that?

**Comment:** In regard to intercessory prayers, it's almost like we are asking God to make a decision.

**Response:** **Prayer is actually a process whereby we open ourselves to divine influence.** And if we are praying authentically, we're praying for the will of God to be done. The “Our Father” is not so much a prayer to be recited as it is the very structure of all prayer. We have to address God the Father, who is owed our respect; and his name needs to be held holy by us. And then we have to pray for his priorities: that the kingdom of God comes, that the will of God be done on earth. So as we pray for whatever it is that we need, we are also praying that God's will be done first. “Give us this day our daily bread” refers to all our needs; our needs are our bread. But that comes late in that prayer. First comes the kingdom and the will of God done on earth. **So as we pray, we're praying that we will become open to the will of God and part of the kingdom of God.** And so we are **praying for our own change.** And **as we are transformed into another Christ** or into a being that reflects the will of Christ, **we find the will of God is done for us.** And so we are actually changed. Along the way **sometimes the very specifics we pray for are granted and sometimes they're not.** And we all have that experience.

**Comment:** Some number of years ago, I was told that St. Augustine said that we give greater honor and glory to God if we think of it that he just made one decision; it was just like one event.

**Response:** Well, that is the way Augustine thought. Augustine thought of everything like a seed that was simply growing. That is true. Augustine had that idea. I

don't know that actually is completely correct, though. But that's true; that's the way he thought.

**Question:** Well, but God doesn't change his mind?

**Answer:** That is correct.

**Comment:** In the Old Testament it seems like his people were **bargaining with God** from finding ten just men, to talking him down to one.

**Response:** That's right. But I think in that story there's a lesson about really the responsibilities, for example, of Abraham and Moses to intercede for the community, and the need to be interested in something beyond oneself, to be interested in the total community. So I think that's the lesson in those stories. **I really don't honestly think that by bartering with God you are actually going to change his mind.**

**Comment:** The Old Testament perception of God is different.

**Response:** It is. It is different—absolutely. Why? Because in **the New Testament the perception of God is through the eyes of Christ**, who is the Word of God and fully human, but he is also the one who is rejected. He is the one who is marginalized. Okay? He is the stone rejected by the builder; so his perceptions of God, life, community—**everything—are all colored by his experience, as all of our experiences color the way we perceive things.** So you are absolutely right that the New Testament perceptions are different from the Old.

**Comment:** Well, now the Incarnation, it seems to me that something new happened.

**Response:** Well, I would say! Something new happened, but maybe not a new decision. Maybe this was part of the original plan. We'll go into that in a minute.

**Comment:** Not only decision, but now God became man, so that now God also has a human nature.

**Response:** That's correct

**Comment:** He added a human nature to his divine nature.

**Response:** In the Second Person, right.

**Comment:** So now there is something new in heaven.

**Response:** Right.

**Comment:** Jesus said that he was going up to heaven, that he was going to sit at the right hand of God.

**Response:** That's correct.

**Comment:** Before he went up he said that all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

**Response:** That is correct.

**Question:** So does that mean he can be acting in his human nature?

**Answer:** Yes, absolutely.

**Comment:** Jesus, acting in his human nature, can make decisions.

**Response:** Right, he can. That's correct. But one thing I want to add is sometimes we say that Jesus opened the gates of heaven. That's somewhat misspoken. **He is the gate.** It is because he assumed the human nature that human beings now can be divinized, that they can receive this beatific vision. They can become like God. So it's really through him that that happens. **It's not something he does, as much as something he is!** He is the gate through which we get to the Father.

**Question:** About the name of "Jesus"?

**Answer:** Well, "Jesus" is the name we give to God who has become man.

**Question:** He didn't have the name of "Jesus" before?

**Answer:** That is correct. The Word of God before the incarnation is just called the "Word of God." And then in the Incarnation his name is "Jesus," and his title is "Christ."

**Question:** So we associate that name pretty much with his human nature?

**Answer:** Yes, as long as you always understand that the human nature is united to the divine nature.

**Question:** So on earth when Jesus said, "I will it," was he willing in his human nature?

**Answer:** Yes, he was willing in his human nature, but his human nature was a vehicle of the divine. Otherwise, there would be no sacramental significance to **his miracles.** They **wouldn't be signs of the will of God unless his human nature was reflecting the divine.** We will be getting into that a little bit more in today's sharing.

Okay. I want to **clarify the use of the word “concept” versus the word “idea.”** A concept is a simple idea. They’re not exactly two different kinds of realities. They’re both mental realities. The best way you can get to a concept is open a dictionary. Those are all concepts. A definition is a concept. An idea is more complex. So you can have a definition of a dog in the dictionary. That’s a concept. But if you know dogs, you have a bigger idea of what a dog is than you would get by reading a concept in the dictionary. You understand that? So I know some people didn’t quite get the difference the other evening.

Now I want to talk today about the **Incarnation and the result of the Incarnation in our world.** I’m going back to the idea of our **universe**, which is also called the “creation.” Now it’s very interesting today that many people—many scientists—who are atheists, nonetheless, call the universe the “creation.” However, the very idea of the creation implies the Creator; however, it doesn’t mean that everyone agrees with that. But the idea of **the universe is all things, all things connected; it’s everything.** That’s the original use of the term, and that’s our use of the term.

People talk about “multi universes,” “parallel universes.” They are using peculiar language and they are talking about something which probably doesn’t exist; and I’ll tell you why they do it. It’s related to theology. **If you look at the origin of the universe, you find that there are extraordinary coincidences**—extraordinary coincidences! And these coincidences are very difficult to explain away. I will list a couple of them for you.

This is a very fine book. I recommend it to anybody—I bought it at Borders—called *God the Evidence* by Patrick Glynn, *The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World*.<sup>1</sup> That’s the title of the book. Now here are just a few examples of coincidences **that go to make the universe and produce the life that we share.**

- Number one: “Gravity is roughly  $10^{39}$  times weaker than electromagnetism.” Electromagnetism is the force that keeps the electron attached to the proton in an atom. “If gravity had been  $10^{33}$ —now that’s not a big difference,  $10^{39}$  versus  $10^{33}$ —“times weaker than electromagnetism, ‘stars would be a million times less massive and would burn a million times faster,’” which means no planets would ever form; there could be no planets!
- Two: “The nuclear weak force is  $10^{28}$  times the strength of gravity. Had the weak force been slightly weaker, all the hydrogen in the universe would have been turned to helium (making water impossible)—therefore no life!
- “A stronger nuclear force (by as little as 2 percent) would have prevented the formation of protons—yielding a universe without atoms. Decreasing it by 5 percent would have given us a universe without stars”—therefore no sun and therefore no planets!

- “If the difference in mass between a proton and a neutron were not exactly as it is—roughly twice the mass of an electron—then all neutrons would have become protons or vice versa. Say good-bye to chemistry as we know it—and to life.”
- “The very nature of water—so vital to life—is something of a mystery (a point noticed by one of the forerunners of anthropic reasoning in the nineteenth century, Harvard biologist Lawrence Henderson). Unique among the molecules, water is lighter in its solid than liquid form: Ice floats. If it did not, the oceans would freeze from the bottom up and earth would now be covered with solid ice. This property in turn is traceable to unique properties of the hydrogen atom.”
- “The synthesis of carbon—the vital core of all organic molecules—” [all living things have carbon] “on a significant scale involves what scientists view as an ‘astonishing’ coincidence in the ratio of the strong force to electromagnetism.” The strong force means the force that keeps two protons or several protons together in the nucleus of an atom. They are all positive, so they should repel each other, as it would in a magnet—see. Two north poles would repel each other, but in the atom it’s kept together by the strong force. “This ratio makes it possible for carbon-12 to reach an excited state of exactly 7.65 MeV” (Million electron Volts) “at the temperature typical of the center of the stars, which creates a resonance involving helium-4, beryllium-8, and carbon-12—allowing the necessary binding to take place during a tiny window of opportunity,” which is “ $10^{-17}$  seconds long.” Which means if you put a decimal point and seventeen zeros ending in 1, that’s an  $n^{\text{th}}$  of a second—that’s how long the window of opportunity is for this to happen.

Now these are just a few of the many coincidences that make life possible. So met with this, **people who have a preference for atheism say**, “Well, we shouldn’t be too amazed. We shouldn’t wonder at all these coincidences because—what did I tell you the first night? “In infinite space anything that can happen, will.” Right? That’s what they say. In infinite space anything that can happen eventually will. So that’s their argument. In other words, **things happen just because they can**. And obviously everything can happen or it wouldn’t, so don’t worry and don’t wonder and don’t be amazed at this.

Carl Sagen used to say, “There are billions and billions and billions of universes.” Well, we only know of one. Now could there actually be universes totally separate from the universe we know? Yes, there could be. But can that play a role in science? I don’t see how; I personally don’t see how! Even in the universe we know, we do know that there is a horizon problem, that is, there is light that is beyond our vision. We’re pretty sure of that because light can only travel so fast, and as the universe expands we can only see that amount of light that can travel in the length of time that has existed. So the light that went away from us instead of toward us we can’t see. So we can say that definitely the universe has all kinds of hidden mysteries. But are there universes independent of ours? This is pure fantasy. Some say it’s on the other side of black holes. A black hole is a place in the universe where gravity compresses everything and even light can’t get out because of the tremendous gravitational warping of space. So some say, “Well, on the other side of black holes maybe there’s another universe. Well, I suppose it’s

possible, but it really doesn't apply to the universe we know. And so the list goes on. And there's a book called *Universes* by John Lesley that has all of the coincidences, and it's a pretty large book, I understand.

This does not mean that there is not actually chance at work in the universe. We don't want to say there's no such thing as chance. We don't want to say there's no such thing as randomness. Indeed in such a world of chance and randomness that places, you might say, holes in the chain of cause and effect.

Now **Eastern philosophy**, going back to the time of Buddha and before into Yoga, ancient Yoga, thought of a universe where **everything was cause and effect**. Nothing could ever change. There's **no room for freedom**. We don't believe in that kind of a world. Supposedly, **Calvin** had a similar idea of the universe with no possibility of freedom. He denied free will. And apparently his ideas were close to some of the ideas of **Newton** and other of the early scientists. However, we don't see a world like that! **We see a world where there is movement, where there is a certain amount of randomness. But we have to realize that randomness does not create order. And all these coincidences could not be the result of chance.**

Now if we go into the Bible in the Book of Genesis, which is again a poetic book, we should not interpret it literally, but rather we should interpret it according to the mind of its author. It talks about the creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God. **Does this rule out evolution or does it not?** Well, not really; but it does depend upon **what you mean by evolution**, because Darwin's understanding of evolution is a process that is unguided, unconscious, and mechanical. Another way of saying that is, with no purpose, in other words, mindless. And according to his idea, the time lapse is so enormous that in a long period of time anything can happen, and what we see is what happened. Well, that understanding of evolution is incompatible with any kind of belief in a purposeful universe. However, that doesn't mean that there isn't development.

The problem with evolution from the beginning is that those people who promoted evolution were **atheists**; those people who were countering evolution were not simply theist! They happened to be **fundamentalists** who defended a literal interpretation of the Bible, which is foolish! So there was no middle ground. This is the problem in the nineteenth century; it's the problem in much of the twentieth century. And I have read quite a few of these scientists, and they always look at the opposition in the most foolish possible light.

But **there are intelligent ways of understanding growth and development** that take into account the evidence of many past and now extinct species; much growth and development; and at the same time something in the human nature that's utterly unique, especially its rationality, its capacity for insight and freedom, which we have in the past talked about in terms of soul. **So we believe that human life evolved, if by human life you mean not the life of a rational creature, but the organism into which rationality found a home.**

Now think of the idea of why did God create the universe? Well, if all these coincidences are correct, and they seem to be, I think it is perfectly right to say that God created everything that we see in order to bring about life, and **life in order to bring about a creature**, a creature—a creation—**that is fitting and capable of receiving the image of God, which involves the development of the human brain as we know it.** So we have in the human person—and we do know that in all of the earth anyway, that the human brain is the most evolute, the most complex, organism. So I think it's perfectly reasonable to say that God proceeded in a very flexible way to bring forth possibilities according to lines that were not originally drawn, not predestined; according to forms that God himself allowed to grow out of the potential that he had placed within them, adapting always to the local environment, eventually arriving at a place where there was a being, a living physical being, who had the **capacity to become aware.** And once that capacity to become aware existed, then there was **capacity for choice and freedom.** And once there is capacity for choice and freedom, there is now the **possibility of companionship with God,** whose nature is pure intelligence and pure freedom.

Evolution, in fact, does us a favor because it explains some of the most difficult aspects of human nature. In the past before evolution became a common idea in the world of ideas, philosophy and theology, we had to blame, if you want to use that word, we had to credit sin for everything that went wrong. But that really isn't probably true. If we look to the idea of original sin, what is that? Well, one thing we can tell about evolution is evolution always remembers everything that goes before. If you study the development of the fetus, it goes through different shapes corresponding to different levels of evolution. I think you have done that probably; you've seen that already. In a sense a human being is a collection of all of nature's work up to this point. And the other primates are also collections up to that point. Everything is a collection of everything that goes before it.

Now there was this capacity for awareness and choice and freedom inside. At the very same time, simultaneous with this there is also the entire history of the animal kingdom. There is the entire history of the origin and development of everything. So **original sin is not probably an event as much as it is a description of a fork in a road at which point human life is capable of following a new path, but it was also capable of following an old path.** The very nature of choice is that it's choice! **The very nature of a choice is an absence of compulsion.** We don't see this with other creatures. We don't see it with monkeys. We don't see an absence of compulsion. We don't see it with dogs or sheep or kangaroos. We see they live completely by instinct.

Now the fact that human beings are capable of living without compulsion doesn't mean that they do. It's a capacity. It's an ability. It's a choice. It's a potential. **They can live according to their own insight, or they can continue to live according to their will to survive,** according to the law of survival of the fittest, according to the law of might makes right. We can see that the human organism, precisely because it evolved from something lower, is capable of surviving without rationality. We don't really need reason to survive. We don't need freedom to survive. Chimpanzees don't either; orangutans don't either; lions don't either. No animal needs reason to survive. Further,

if **an animal can exist without rationality**, it could under the right circumstances exist with a **compromised rationality**, that is, a rationality that wouldn't be used properly for the end intended; in other words, it could be misused. And this is presumably exactly what happened, that **as human beings evolved they did not by and large use the potential that God gave them in human rationality, freedom, and intelligence, either at all or not for the purpose for which God gave it.** Consequently we have the stories of Cain and Able, Noah, God's anger and bitter disappointment at the creation itself and his desire to get rid of the whole thing, and his decision to save a little part of it to see if he could perhaps make some changes.

So it's in this kind of a world that we then see **the formation of a people who are called on to be holy. To be holy means to be peculiar.** Peculiar means way beyond the norm. It's not talking about morality; this is a world where morality is totally compromised in the first place. God calls a people to become holy as he is holy. And this is a new idea, if you want to call it that, a new possibility, which in a sense is **very basic to what human beings are but never were**, created to be but they've never really become that. But then the whole history of the Old Testament, the entire history is a history of disappointment. In spite of all the interventions, the mighty works, the signs, the law, the wisdom, the prophets, there is nothing but disappointment until the Incarnation of the Word of God. And in the Incarnation of the Word of God there now comes someone who is willing to live the true potential that was put in the beginning in humanity, but **it requires a momentous change in the way human beings perceive life**, a tremendous change in the habitual way people take life, a change **in the habitual way people perceive God.** And this is a radical change. It's a radical change that is so radical that on reflection later on, people realize that **it never could have happened without this new creation that comes in Christ.**

So now what actually went on in Christ? Well, we already talked about what it means to combine the divine and the human natures. We have the will of God, which is simple: there is one will in God; there is one God; there is one divine Being. And this one divine Being is not a being, but it is **the Being**, the ground, the eternal One, the only eternal One, the One; this is God! **And God chooses that God's own knowledge of himself shall take up a human nature and join completely with that nature**, which has a double purpose. First of all, it is to **reveal** to human beings **the nature of God**, the will of God, the mind of God, but also at the very same time it reveals to human beings **their own nature.** Since in the beginning the human nature was made in the image of God, in a sense it was fashioned as a reflection of the Word of God in the beginning. What was the basis for the creation of Adam in the first place? It was already the Word of God. In fact, everything that was created was created in the Word and through the Word. "Without the Word nothing came to be." That's what it says in the Prologue of John's Gospel. So in Christ we see now the true purpose of everything from the "big bang" onward. **It all leads up to this possibility that God could enter into his own creation in a being that can actually reflect his nature and do his will.** What I cannot explain, and what remains a complete mystery to me, is why the wait between the origin of humanity and the time of Christ? First of all, how long was it? I don't know. And why was there a wait? I don't know that either. But maybe the reason is that if Christ had

come in the beginning there would have been no one around to join with him. I don't know.

Now **in Christ there is the divine will and there is human will**, a created human will, because Jesus is fully human. Now even though we could not posit that Jesus in his freedom would ever go against his divine will because that would make no sense; that would be internal contradiction—that would be a real crisis! I mean, he would be going against his very Being, the very ground of his own Being. But nonetheless, **that doesn't mean that for the human will of Jesus to affirm and to follow and to conform itself to the divine will was an easy matter**. I think that should be the basis of some really serious meditation on our part. **What did it mean for Jesus in his human nature to actually conform to the will of God? And what did it cost?**

It's very interesting in the writings of **John of the Cross**, when he talks about some of his **greatest suffering**, he talks about suffering because of the **inability of his own mind**, his own thoughts, his own intellect, **to grasp in any way any truth about God**. Now does he say this—and I don't know the answer; I'm just asking you—do you think he says this because of his own sinful condition, or does he say it merely because of his human condition? **If he says it because of his human condition, then he is indicating something that Jesus himself must have also suffered**. Now suffering with this sort of friction is not something foreign to us. As we grow up I think if we have loving parents we try to understand them and yet we can't until we get in their shoes and all of a sudden, "Boy, was my old man smart!" But not when I'm a teenager! What's wrong with this guy? I don't think we should take that away from Jesus. I think he must have dealt with the same issues, and not just with his foster father, Joseph, or his mother, Mary, but also with God, his Father. **I think he had to suffer learning what God was all about**. And that's why I think Hebrews says, "Son though he was, Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered." So the difference between "learned obedience" and blind obedience—it never says Jesus was blindly obedient. It says he learned obedience. And he "grew in age and wisdom before God and man."

**And so when he now begins his mission, his ministry, what did he understand?** Well, of course, we will never know; at least we can't know now! But he probably, I'm just speculating, I think he probably had some very great ideas and great vision that he was going to share with anybody who would want to listen. And I imagine that he had a **great deal of hope and joy and enthusiasm as he set out**. And we can see that he was extremely effective in his ministry. But then we know what happened. He built up an opposition, and this **opposition became greater** and greater and greater—an hostility, a hatred. Where did it come from? One thing hostility and hatred come from is the evil one; but when you're living in a human society and people hate you, **this is not an easy thing to deal with**. And I think we should realize that this was not easy for Jesus either. But again, **his human will had to embrace the divine will, even though this caused enormous suffering**. Did you want to say something?

**Comment:** He knew all his life though that would be his fate as a human. He knew that would be his fate that he would die on the cross, that he would be—

**Response:** I don't know if he knew that in his humanity. I don't know.

**Question:** But if he knew his Father and his divinity, then wouldn't he know?

**Answer:** Well, I don't think that includes that because, as St. Thomas points out, the knowledge of God and our knowledge is so different that we can hardly imagine the difference. So the fact that he knew the Father I don't think really means that he knew his fate in that way. Sometimes people imagine that Jesus was sent precisely to die on the cross. I don't really think that's a good way to put it. I think Jesus was sent to be a faithful Son and in Palestine at that time what that entailed was that he suffer crucifixion, which he accepted; but I don't think he was sent to be crucified. **I think he was sent to be faithful and it involved crucifixion and suffering.** But I think no matter where he went it would have involved a great deal of suffering. And I think no matter where he went it would have involved a great deal of hostility because of the woundedness of human nature. **Human nature is wounded, and human nature has embraced the lie of falsity, of a false self, of self-love, all of which is constantly fanned by the evil one; and this tremendous power will attack anything that tries to unseat it.**

**Comment:** Suffering Servant of Old Testament. Christ to fulfill what was written in Scripture.

**Response:** Exactly, but what was that? See, there's nothing in Scripture about the crucifixion. Suffering Servant is part of it because Isaiah is talking about—first of all, Isaiah may be talking about himself; he may be talking about the people as a whole. So what Christian people always did was they took these prophecies and interpreted them in terms of Christ.

**Question:** Would atonement have been satisfied without him dying on the cross if he just suffered and died in some other way?

**Answer:** Well, you know I can't answer that. The atonement could have been anything God wanted it to be. It could be that the Incarnation itself could be atoning. But, in fact, the life of that particular time and place and **the life of Jesus himself and his fidelity to the Father, all was tied up into the rejection of him by various people,** and particularly Pontius Pilate. I mean, after all, he is the one who actually crucified him—the Romans, that is. And his **willingness to let go of his human life on earth** is part of the way in which he would honor the Father, so it's the atonement. Could that have been done some other way? I presume it could have been done some other way. What would have been required? We know one thing: **always faithfulness.**

Now what you see in the death of Christ is a **reinterpretation of what it means to survive.** Survival, since the beginning of time, has meant living in the human body. Jesus' view is that living in the human body is not surviving. **Surviving is knowing the Father and going to the Father.** That's what he makes clear. I'm not saying necessarily in his own words. I'm not sure of his words, but the words in Scripture,

which reflect his ideas. So he reinterprets that. He **reinterprets what it means to be the fittest**. The fittest up to that point was the strongest, the one who could have power over others, the one who could dominate. He interprets the fittest as **the one who could be most humble and most compassionate and most loving**. These are not qualities that society believed in, not particularly because it was Jewish, but because it was simply not a human way of looking at things.

**Question:** About Jesus dying some other way like cancer?

**Answer:** That I really don't know. I would think that's not the same thing because he really died having been killed, and he **died forgiving his killers**. So I think that is kind of a significant part of it. He is **dealing with the age-old issues of retaliation, vengeance, murder**, you know, Cain and Able, one of the first stories. And dying of some disease, that would not have been the same thing.

**Question:** No matter how he died, wasn't it the redeemer part and the fact that he was the gate of heaven for us involved in suffering? And if you could talk a little bit about the emphasis of the Church today of redemption through the cross. In other words, suffering plays a big role. Didn't Jesus as a man know in some way that he had to suffer? Because of the political events of the time that is the way it happened and he had no control over, but didn't he know that he came to suffer, that he couldn't be the gate of heaven if he didn't suffer?

**Answer:** I don't know if he knew it in the very beginning, but I think he learned it pretty quick, as we all do! We see that people who are pure and honest create a tremendous opposition. Isn't that true? **In terms of embracing the cross, we have to go beyond suffering; we have to go to death!** To embrace the cross means to embrace death! And that's a very important thing because he is talking about gaining eternal life. Eternal life is not an extension of physical life. It's something different from physical life. So when a Christian is baptized, **we're baptized into the death of Christ so that we can live a new life**, a life that is different from simply the life of the physical body. The life of the physical body has its own so-called drives and emotions and passions, which are part of our nature, but they cannot be in charge. If they're in charge of our lives, then that's called "living in the flesh." **If we're living in the faith, then we're living on a higher level and under the influence of Christ**. That's what it means to live in Christ, in his Spirit. So it's a different principle.

**Comment:** One of the things we embrace is the resurrection.

**Response:** The resurrection is essential to our faith. It's the cornerstone of our faith. But the **resurrection could not have taken place without his death**. **We need to accept our death in order to reach the resurrection**. We can't bypass it, which some people might like to do. I mean, let's face it!

**Comment:** Although Constantine didn't do it until his death.

**Response:** Constantine was not a Christian until he died, and I don't know if he was then either! Constantine's mother was a Christian. People don't get this story right! Constantine did not convert. His mother was a devout Catholic. At that time, incidentally, not all Christians were Catholics. I said that on the other paper. There were a lot of Arians. Arians believed that Jesus was not God and not man, something like an angel, something like the Jehovah's Witnesses today teach. But **Constantine's mother was a devout Catholic.** That means she would believe in what we believe. Now he persecuted the Church for the same reason all the other Roman emperors persecuted the Church. **The Church was made up of people who had a higher principle to be loyal to than the emperor.** And the principle of the Roman Empire was that there was no higher principle than the emperor. The emperor was divine. There is no higher good than the will of the emperor. So all the emperors persecuted the Church—sporadically anyway. However, **how can you persecute a group that your mother belongs to?** That's the major issue. And I am amazed at how many history books slide over that. She was the one that turned the tide. Now it's very interesting if you read the Book of Revelation and all those prophecies about the end times. They don't mention the conversion of the Roman Empire.

**Comment:** About Christ's death.

**Response:** **His death was a sacrifice. He surrendered his life voluntarily.** That's the problem I have with cancer. I just don't see that as being parallel.

**Question:** Didn't Christ have to die to reconcile man with God?

**Answer:** Well, I think he had to die, but I think the death probably was going to be violent, whether it had to be the cross, I don't know that. It seems the violence of the death was part of the whole picture—and the hatred, that he forgave; that was all part of it: the fact that **he didn't retaliate**, but he could have. “‘Vengeance is mine,’ saith the Lord.” You know, that's an old statement from the Old Testament, and it really meant that the people were not to have private vengeance, but were to follow only the law. Okay? Jesus extended that to mean that they weren't supposed to even have any public vengeance, that the **whole idea of vengeance was inappropriate from the standpoint of the holiness of God.** Now how that all works out in time, of course, it's up and down all over the place!

**Comment:** It sounds like you are going deeper or transcending everything we learned in our Catholic tradition. It's not only what we learned, but that God's divinity was in the human nature and that Christ allowed that to come through is also a message for us. It's not just the death and being saved and that he is the gate, but it's the whole idea that we now can do that because Jesus did that. Divinity would reside in the human nature.

**Response:** That's correct. **There is now a new potential for us.**

**Question:** As a whole, has that come to light in the human race?

**Answer:** On the one hand, most people, even atheists, would agree in terms of public morality most of the principles of human dignity and human rights—they like to talk that language. So it's not like no one ever heard of the **New Testament. People have heard of it, but as far as personal faith that embraces both their public and their private lives, that's something else again!** The Bible talks about the fullness of time. Christ came in the fullness of time. No one knows what that means, but it has something to do with the fact that it was just the right moment in the history of the world. Maybe it means—some people think it means—that if Christ hadn't come at that very moment, the world would have gone into self-destruction. That's possible. Another interpretation is that at that time because of the development by the Roman Empire of other trade routes it was possible to communicate with much of the known world—it was mostly limited to Eurasia, but it was possible to communicate. And Palestine is somewhat in the midpoint of Eurasia—you know, from Ireland to China it's kind of in the middle. So that's another possible interpretation.

But I think it's not important to have answers. **It's important to think and pray, and to pray about, you know, what was it that Jesus experienced? What were the terms of the experience? Because I believe that in some way we have to experience the same thing.** We have to get away from thinking things happen by magic, instantaneously; **life is a process. What was the process that Jesus went through in realizing what it was that the Father was calling him to? Why did he go to the Garden of Gethsemani and pray, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"?** **What was that prayer? What did that mean? What is that prayer in your life? When have you prayed that the cup pass? And has it? And how have you dealt with it when it hasn't passed?**

See, ultimately, to me, **Christ is the one who is radically obedient to the will of God** and exposes the normal human psyche, if you want to call it that, or mind as profoundly defective in the sense that **we think that we have a center that we can operate out of—independent of God!** You go back to the Garden of Eden again and the story of the serpent and Eve. The serpent says to Eve, "O Eve, don't listen to God. God doesn't want you to know, but if you only ignore him, you'll be equal. You'll be equal to God knowing good and evil. Just go right ahead and eat that fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." So that's that **basic distrust!** And Jesus has to come and reverse all that and show **complete trust.**

Now if you are constantly being coddled, of course you are going to trust! Babies who are constantly taken care of every second of their lives have utter trust in their caretakers. But just watch when sooner or later, you know, mothers can't be everywhere and fathers can't be everywhere. Sooner or later there is going to be a need that this child is not going to have satisfied, and watch what happens! And that's what we call the **inherited original sin.** That's *peccatum originale originatum*. It's passed on to every person. Children who aren't even aware yet already have **an ego; they have a false self.** They start operating.

Now **Jesus could not have had that false self because his Being was rooted in the Word of God.** He didn't have an act of existence independent of God. You understand? That's what I tried to explain last week. Recall that? It's still here. [Going to the flip chart.] See, Jesus' act of existence is the Word of God. Ours is not. **Ours is an independent creation. And out of this we can create a whole independent world in our imagination.** And that is the root of our attempted independence from God and a life that is centered on self. **Jesus could not have had that. His soul had no separate existence from God. It was human, but it had no separate existence from God. It was energized by the act of God itself—pure act.** And yet at the same time he did have a human soul and he did have human feelings and human passions and everything else. He lived in a human society, and so **he was always being pulled.** And therefore I would have to say in a certain sense **his temptations were probably greater in a certain way,** if you understand what I mean. They were **more of a pull away from what he already was.** Do you understand?

**Comment:** He must have felt very odd.

**Response:** Well, he must have felt very odd, because that is the very meaning of the word “holy.” It's peculiar, not the norm, *qadosh*—not the norm. God is not the norm. “My thoughts are not your thoughts.” Now Jesus is—and the people are **called to be “qadosh”** also, not the norm. How many ways did they try to prove this? The way they dressed, the way they ate, the way they spoke. Even to this day very often Jewish communities have their own dialects—not only their own language, Hebrew, but they have dialects of German and of other languages. Why? Because they're *qadosh*; they're holy. They're supposed to be separate. They're not supposed to be like the Gentiles. They're not supposed to eat food like the Gentiles. They aren't supposed to dress like the Gentiles. They're supposed to be different. Now I don't know how much of that is really rooted in biblical teaching or how much of it is part of their customs. I don't know all of that either, but you can see this idea of separation.

But now for Jesus the experience must have been very different from that because that's external, **but for him it was internal. He knew he was different, and he knew God in a way that no one else seemed to know.** That would not itself been a suffering, of course, but then what would have been a suffering would be that he was constantly being drawn to be like others, because **part of human consciousness** is a wanting to fit in—is it not? Do people not want to fit in? People also want to, by their human consciousness, want to stand out. They want to **fit in and stand out at the same time!**—and often do so in rather awkward ways, which are often the source of a great deal of suffering, which is not redemptive because it isn't really healthful. It isn't healthy. It isn't serving a greater purpose. In fact, it's working against a greater purpose.

Now I think we all have to think about all these things. There are ways in which, of course, fitting in is good and important, and there are other ways it's not. In each case **there is a healthy way of living, and there's a way of being exaggerated on one side or the other. And I think Christ had to learn all these things just as we do.** But he was not burdened with the deception of being independent of God—that he did not have!

**Question:** When does Jesus become the Messiah or the Christ, which means the anointed?

**Answer:** You mean in the Bible? **According to the Bible, he becomes the Messiah in his baptism.**

**Question:** Not his transfiguration?

**Answer:** No, I think it's in his baptism. That seems to be what the evangelists are trying to say. Now is he really becoming at the moment, but wasn't the moment before? Well, no, he was called to be that all along. But it's kind of the **manifestation of who he is**, and it's also an expression of his willingness to be it insofar as he needed to affirm that in his own humanity. **He joined in his baptism with sinners.** See? He became one with sinners in a rather outward, symbolic, significant way. He didn't need to be baptized for repentance, but he chose to. So that was already in solidarity with sinners. How did he have that already? Not really. So in that way that was a movement toward his passion. Any other clarifications, questions? What are you thinking about?

**Comment:** I'm thinking about the Athanasian Creed.

**Response:** Oh, what do you want to ask about that? Last week you got the Athanasian Creed—right? And what would you like to ask about that?

**Question:** We hear this word “begotten.” “The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father;”—and then we come to the Spirit—“the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son.” But that word “begotten,” where does that word come from?

**Answer:** Where does the word come from? You don't know where it fits in? Well, I agree that the word “begotten” normally does not fit in. And there was once a third grader in St. Francis who said to me one day, “Father, is Jesus God?” And I said yes. “And is the Father God?” And I said yes. And he said, “And God is eternal?” And I said, yes. And he said, “Well, how could a Son be eternal and the Father be eternal and how could he still be a Son?” Well, you see the idea is a son follows, is younger than, the father. That's what this kid saw clearly in the words we use. And he is right. So our words aren't always used in the exact same way.

**What is begotten is the Word as in our intellects we beget an understanding of something and it proceeds from us.** And that's what it means that the Son is begotten. In the way you would form—you could say “conceive,” as you conceive a concept. The Son is conceived by the Father, begotten by the Father. The reason why the word “begotten” is used and not “conceived” is because in ancient language the word “conceived” is used of women, “begotten” of men, and so the Father is Father. It means to conceive. **The Father conceives an understanding of who God is, and that is what**

**the Son is.** But it's an eternal thing because the Father never existed without this conception, could not exist without it, because there are not three gods, but **there's one God with three relations, internal relations. And the relationship is the Father is begetting his understanding of God, and that is the Son, and spirating the love which is God, and that is the Spirit.** So it's technical language.

**Question:** What is the impact of grace on the soul? How does grace impact the soul?

**Answer:** **Grace is the likeness of God in the soul. And it comes in degrees.**

**Question:** And how?

**Answer:** Well, in different ways. For example, **the grace of justification by which we become basically oriented toward God, that comes in Baptism.** In our daily lives God is giving us **actual grace to do good things**, to do what God would do if God were in your shoes: helping a neighbor or forgiving an insult or whatever it be. See, those are actual graces constantly coming our way. They are inspirations; they are insights; they are something that operates within our soul that helps us to be like God: to do like God, to be like God, to have God's thoughts.

**Question:** So the soul is like a receiving area for grace?

**Answer:** **The soul is our strictly human life and it is receptive.** It has the capacity to receive from God. You almost might compare it to a radio that gets signals from a sender. And the soul is capable of picking up information. And there are various frequencies that operate on various levels of our being. Some of them we are unconscious of and some we are more conscious of. But they all have an effect to either push us or pull us or elevate us into more Christ-like operation.

**Question:** What distinguishes the death of Christ from any self-immolation or human catastrophes of war or starvation?

**Answer:** That's a very good point. You see, those immolations, those suicide bombings and so on, are driven by the false self. In Christ there is no false self. To some degree—I don't want you to misinterpret this—**to some degree in Christ there was an emptiness where we are full, because very often what we are full of is ourselves!** And Jesus wasn't full of himself. So to some degree he was empty. And **in that emptiness there was room for God.** So it says, "Son though he was, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, emptied himself and took the form of a slave." So his slave-life was his emptiness, his human emptiness, which was capacity to receive God, **but also capacity to receive others.**

**Question:** Getting back to the Athanasian Creed, on the second page, the third sentence from the top: "It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe

that our Lord Jesus Christ became flesh.” It seems to me that’s not stated correctly. Wouldn’t it be better to say that God became flesh?

**Answer:** You are right.

**Comment:** because Jesus didn’t exist—

**Response:** Athanasius, I mean, he was just! That’s a good point. You’re right. You know, in the early Creeds though, they didn’t refine all those terms for a long time. In fact, in many cases they fought about them—meanly.

Well, I hope this is helping you. Don’t forget the two goals. **Contemplative prayer**, so when you come to Mass you **think of Jesus emptying himself**, you think of Jesus voluntarily dying, what that was. And try to **find in your own life a similar parallel experience. You bring that to the Mass. You offer yourself with Jesus to the Father.** That’s living the contemplative prayer, living contemplative faith.

The second goal was that **you understand something about your faith so that you can discuss it with people, especially unbelievers.** And you might not realize this, but most people are unbelievers! There may be a lot of people who claim to be Christian, but if you go down very far, they don’t really understand the Word of God at all. And mostly what they live out of is flesh. And mostly what they live out of is the world. And I don’t say that in condemnation; it’s just a fact. And by your witness, I mean, I’ve heard so many cases of people—the author of this book was an atheist. And he fell in love with a woman who was a believer. He said, “a devout Christian, but she didn’t quite go to church very often.” But she brought him back because her love was such a powerful force in his life, he could no longer turn away from God and had to rethink everything. And he went through—this book—it’s a fabulous book. It goes through physics, psychology, medicine, the role of prayer in healing people, near death experiences, and then life itself, and he just realized that God is the real key to everything! And he didn’t know it before even though he had quite a few degrees. Originally brought up Roman Catholic, but gave all that up.<sup>2</sup> **So the more you understand, the more you can share—you never know how you can bring someone to the Lord!** So God bless you. Let’s say a prayer.

---

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Glynn, *God The Evidence The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World* (United States of America, 1997), p. 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> Glynn, p. 17.