

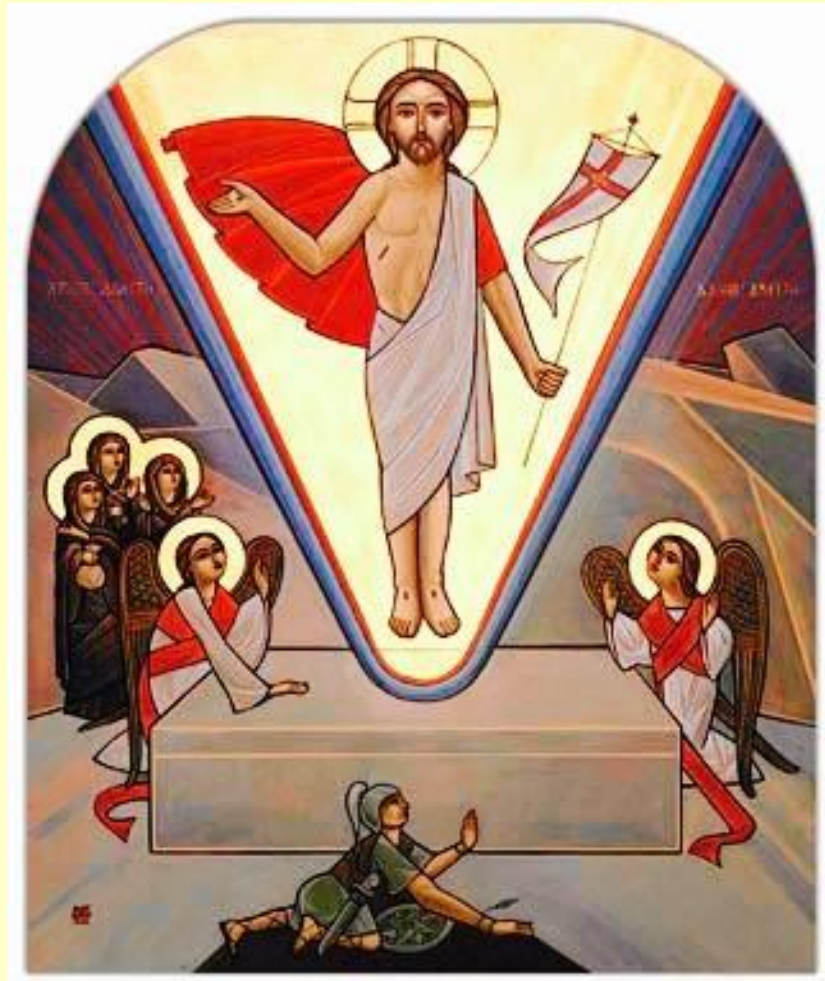
Diocese of Mississauga, Vancouver and Western Canada

PRINCE OF PEACE

MAY 2019 THE HOLY RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:3–4

[3] For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, [4] and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.



AN EXISTENTIAL ARGUMENT FOR THE RESURRECTION FROM ST. ATHANASIUS [IMPARTED]

St. Athanasius, in his beautiful *On the Incarnation*, presents an argument for believing in the reality of Christ's resurrection. It is, one should note, primarily an existential argument for the resurrection, rather than a purely historical one as is most often defended today; but I don't think this makes it any less powerful. Indeed, most people probably find existential arguments more compelling than purely historical arguments, insofar as working through the latter can involve much difficulty and abstraction, whereas the former have the potential to be directly experiential in nature.

First, St. Athanasius points to the martyrs and their willingness to die for the faith as evidence that Christ has in fact "trampled death". But then he continues:

"What has been said so far is no small proof that death has been destroyed and that the lordly cross is the trophy over it. For those having sound mental sight, the proof of the resurrection of the now immortal body effected by Christ, the common Savior of all and true Life, is clearer through visible facts than through arguments. For if death has been destroyed, as the argument has shown, and all trample it down on account of the Lord, all the more did he first trample it down in his own body and destroy it. Death having been put to death by him, what else should happen than that the body should rise and be shown as the trophy over it? Or how else could death be shown to be destroyed, unless the lordly body had arisen? If this proof of his resurrection is not enough for anyone, let him believe what is said from what takes place before his eyes. If anyone is dead, he cannot act, for the gift lasts only until the grave and thereafter ceases; deeds and actions towards other human beings only belong to the living: let him who will, see and judge, confessing the truth from the visible facts. For since the Savior works so many things among human beings, and daily in every place invisibly persuades such a great multitude, both from those who dwell in Greece and

in the foreign lands, to turn to his faith and to obey his teaching, would anyone still have doubt in their mind whether the resurrection has been accomplished by the Savior, and whether Christ is alive, or rather is himself the Life? Is it like a dead man to prick the minds of human beings so that they deny their father's laws and revere the teaching of Christ? Or how, if he is not acting — for this is a property of one dead — does he stop those active and alive so that the adulterer no longer commits adultery, the murderer no longer murders, the unjust no longer grasps greedily, and the impious is henceforth pious? How, if he is not risen but dead, does he stop and drive out and cast down those false gods said by unbelievers to be alive and the demons they worship? For where Christ and his faith are named, there all idolatry is purged away, every deceit of demons refuted, and no demon endures the name but fleeing, only hearing it, disappears. This is not the work of one dead, but of one alive, and especially of God . . . For if it is true that the dead can effect nothing, but the Savior effects such great things every day — drawing to piety, persuading to virtue, teaching about immortality, leading to a desire for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, inspiring power against death, showing himself to each, and purging away the godlessness of idols . . . who then would one say is dead? The Christ effecting such things? But it is not a property of one dead to be active”.

His argument is this: A dead thing, insofar as it is dead, cannot affect anything as an agent cause. But Christ effects things as an agent cause. Therefore, Christ is not dead. And so, he must be alive. Of course, an unbeliever will obviously not accept the premise that Christ effects anything and might even accuse Athanasius of question begging here. While I don't think this sort of argument would ever be successful in a strong sense for inducing belief in the resurrection, I do think it is significantly profound in some ways.

First, as I said, it is an *existential argument*. St. Athanasius is asking us to look to and reflect upon our experiences as human beings living out our lives in history. His own context sheds much light here: The Faith was relatively new, having erupted from the proclamation of a small group of Jewish men that Jesus Christ, who had been crucified, was alive. That such a ridiculous proposition could spread and convince belief would have been outlandish and unprecedented. That it could eventually turn the whole world upside down, conquering the Roman Empire itself and dissipating that paganism which was as old as civilization itself — This was simply inconceivable. And it was done all without the raising of a single sword. In this sense, Athanasius might be appealing to the traditional, pragmatic, “power-dynamic” understanding of truth and religious faith, in which for a people to conquer another people was indisputable proof that the god of the former was true god, triumphing over the god of the latter. And so, we might read Athanasius as saying something like, “Here is Christ, whom you crucified, and yet who has emerged victorious over all the pagan gods. Could a dead god fight, let alone conquer, the whole force of the Greco-Roman pantheon? Absolutely not! Hence Christ cannot be a dead god, He must be the Living God.”

But that sort of thinking will fall on deaf ears in relation to our modern sensitivities. What will be more relevant, perhaps, is the way in which Christ conquered Rome. It was not with storming armies but with the depth and profundity of the message itself. And here St. Athanasius appeals to the astounding moral transformation in the lives of so many Christians. The teaching of Christ is, undoubtedly, the highest and most perfective moral ideal in all human history; so high an ideal, in fact, that there seems to be no reason why the common man should ever think it possible to even attempt, let alone achieve. And yet Christians all over the globe, for nearly two thousand years, have been attempting it, striving towards it, seeking it always. What is it that drives them to do so? What is it that enables them to accomplish such a supernatural feat? Our Western societies have the Christian heritage so deeply ingrained within them that we take for granted

how unique, how unprecedented, how startling was the message and life-style of the early Christians. There really had been nothing like it in all of human history, and it stood in stark contrast to the decaying Roman culture. This was something real and tangible, something visible and evident, something undeniable, that St. Athanasius could point to and say, "Where in all the world, when in all of history, have your pagan gods so transformed the lives of massive amounts of normal individuals?" The answer, of course, was never. The eruption of the Faith and its overwhelming power to change lives was a real effect that necessitated a real cause. If you asked a Christian what had led him/her to such drastic a transformation, their answer would have been simply: "Christ". And so here Athanasius is asking, how could Christ effect all these things, if he is dead and not truly alive?

The real power of such an argument, though, comes from personal experience. An individual who has experienced the dramatic transformation of one's entire life on the basis of faith in Christ will be convinced that it is not their own doing, but that Christ, in a very real sense, must be present within them, working through them, moving and conducting them, and hence that He must be alive.

Of course, I'm hardly claiming that such a claim should have much or any weight to one who doesn't believe. At most, seeing these things from an external perspective, one might be sparked to a curiosity which investigates further the mystery of the Christian Faith. But, then again, it is quite perplexing that on a day some two thousand years ago a Jewish peasant was nailed to a cross by the Roman government, and today billions of people worship that man as their Lord, Savior, and God. It seems strange, odd, inexplicable. Unless, perhaps, it is true.

And so, St. Athanasius writes later:

"As for Greek wisdom and the grandiloquence of the philosophers, I think that no one needs our argument, as the wonder is before the sight of all, that while the wise among the Greeks had written so much, and were unable to persuade even a few from their neighborhood about immortality and the virtuous life, Christ alone by means of simple words and by means of humans not wise in speech has throughout the inhabited world persuaded whole churches full of human beings to despise death but to think rather of things immortal, and to disregard what is temporal but to consider rather things eternal, and to think nothing of earthly glory but to seek rather immortality. Now these things said by us are not merely words but have the witness of their truth from experience itself. Let him who wishes would come up and behold the proof of virtue in the virgins of Christ and in the youth, who live a pure life in chastity, and the belief in immortality in so great a company of martyrs . . . Who, then, and how great is this Christ, who by his naming and presence overshadows and brings to naught everything everywhere, and who is alone powerful over all, and has filled the whole inhabited world with his teaching? Let the Greeks tell us, who greatly mocked and are not ashamed. For if he is a human being, how has one human being exceeded the power of all their gods, and proved by his power that they are nothing? . . . Whose teaching, of all those human beings who ever existed, prevailed from one end of the earth to the other, one and the same throughout the whole, so that his worship has spread through the whole world?"

ABOUT ALBERTAN MONASTERY

ST GEORGE & ST PAUL THE ANCHORITE

The good news we have is the County of Red deer has approved the building permits and now, we are processing the due diligence tasks to satisfy the board requirement.

We are getting quotes on:

- Geotechnical study
- Environmental Assessment
- Hwy intersection Traffic Assessment as the country requested, intersection of Hwy 11 and RR 263
- Electricity connection cost
- Gas Connection cost
- Telecom Connection cost

Currently, the available fund is \$650K and \$500K is still required before the offer conditions removals on Aug 2019.

Also, more fund is required to connect the utilities to the new building.

MONASTERY PODCAST

The monastery website is <https://www.sgpsmonastery.ca/>, the site is still under construction and your feedback is appreciated.

The donations mean are available on the monastery website, your contribution is highly appreciated.

The Facebook page is in prepress.

The contact email is Info@sgspmonastery.ca