



My Beloved Ones,

When discussing Christianity, it is sometimes difficult for non-Christians to accept the actual physical reality of the Resurrection of our Lord. This was just as true in the early years of the Church, even before advances in science and medicine. And yet, a powerful mystery that cannot be disputed is that thousands of people were and are willing to die for a person they have never met in their lives.

In this Sunday's Epistle, the Apostle Paul answers a important and seemingly confusing question for us all. Why would he, a man who, as he says, "*...persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it...*" now choose to help it grow? (*Galatians 1:13-14*).

This question to the Galatian community was, in fact, meant to establish a far greater reality. For Paul took great pains to stress that, though a skillful orator, he was not an inventor. "*I did not receive [the gospel] from man,*" he writes, "*nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ*" (*Galatians 1:12*).

Imagine how powerful this statement must have been to the Galatians; indeed how does it make us feel when we understand that what he is really saying is, "I have witnessed the Lord!"? Only the most virtuous of saints can claim to have witnessed our Creator, and yet there are numerous examples, proving our belief in resurrection. For example, when we read this Sunday's epistle, we will also celebrate the memory of the Seven Youths of Ephesus.

These young men refused to honor the idols, and escaping martyrdom, took shelter in a cave. This took place in about the year 250, but God—in His All-Knowingness—allowed them to fall into a deep sleep. When they awoke, totally preserved, they did not realize that 184 years had passed. In that time, Christianity had become legalized, but though the persecutions ceased, there were still many disagreements and heresies plaguing the Church, including one which said that because the body decomposes after death, the General Resurrection will include only the soul, and not the body.

Of course, while this is the natural explanation, it goes against everything we know from Christ's Resurrection, for He Himself prefigured how all would be resurrected: both in transfigured body and in soul. When the seven holy youths emerged from their cave unchanged after nearly two centuries, the proof of bodily resurrection was given to all, and finally the youths fell asleep in peace.

My brothers and sisters, the central reality of our faith, that Christ conquered death by His Resurrection, naturally requires us to have just that: faith in something that cannot be seen with our modern eyes. Yet I hope and pray, that with the examples of St. Paul's conversion, the Seven Holy Youths of Ephesus, and the many martyrs who have placed their souls in something greater, we too will be strengthened in belief that Christ arose—in body and soul—as will we at His Glorious Second Coming.

+ALEXIOS

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