

Being a Model of Faith

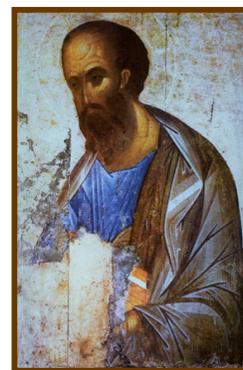
(from the Dismissal Hymn of the feast of St Nicholas)

A Sermon by Father Steve Dalber

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:27-29)

As humans we have struggled continually through time to answer the seemingly simple question; “Who am I?” Philosophers continue to wrestle with this question. Some popular psychology tells us that we are who people tell us we are. Others tell us that we are who we want to be. And of course pop-society advertising tells us that we are what we eat, drink, wear, drive, etc. So we go through life trying to define ourselves or allowing others to define us. But still the question nags us; “who am I?”

The Church offers us an answer, as described by Saint Paul in the above passage. The first verse of the above passage is chanted at many major feast days and at every Orthodox baptism. It is the affirmation that as Christians we must physically take Christ upon us and accept to be His physical image on earth. When we choose to follow Him we must become like Him actually putting Him on like a garment, so that when others see us they see Christ. The question now that begs to be asked is; how can we humans in our fallen and sinful state in any way resemble God? And there is certainly no way that we can answer the question of “who am I?” with “I am Christ.” After all the Church also teaches us that there can only be one Jesus Christ. This being the case then, “who am I?”



It seems that all of the answers to this question are illogical and just don’t make sense. This question isn’t as unsolvable a riddle as it may seem though. The solution to this problem can be found, not in the answer, but rather in the question.



When God created us He created us in His image. God by His nature is a relational being. He is Trinity. While maintaining His oneness in His unique identity, He interrelates in three persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So by being created in His image, we also must by our created nature be relational beings. That is to say that we were not created to be individuals, but rather to be like God and relate to God and to each other. So God created us not as a complete independent unit, but as unique part of a whole. We cannot begin to understand ourselves as individuals because we are not. This means that the “I” in the question “who am I?” doesn’t exist. If the “I” existed it would mean that we declare ourselves independent of God and of creation. It means that we imagine ourselves to be a god. After all wasn’t this Adam’s sin? God created him, and us to be “god” in perfect communion with Him. But, Adam and we choose to be gods apart from God.

The question then that we need to ask is not “who am I?” but rather “who are we?” The above scriptural passage now makes sense and becomes clear. “We” have been created one with God. The notion that we are “I” separates us from God. Jesus Christ the Logos, took on human flesh in order to reunify us to Him and to each other so that we may realize that our true nature is “we,” and that we may be restored to our rightful place in creation, as part of a perfect communion with God. We are not “I” but parts of a far greater whole. This is why we were created. This is why Jesus came into the world. This is why we unite ourselves to each other in the Church. This is why we give ourselves to Christ and to each other through the Eucharist. This is “who we are.” “We” are the very body of Jesus and through Him perfectly and timelessly united to the Holy Trinity. God became man so that “we” can become god.



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