

On the First Letter of Peter (2)

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

1 Peter 1.17-23



The Apostle Peter's words echo the wider Scriptures as a whole: notice these references and allusions, part of what makes his text persuasive to us. In this text there is a clear hint of the 'Servant Songs' in the

Book of the Prophet Isaiah, poetic texts which were understood in the Early Church to describe very specifically the Passion of the Lord:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the living, stricken for the transgressions of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah 53.7-9

There is an echo of the conversation which takes place in John's Gospel between Jesus and Nicodemus, where they discuss the possibility of a 'new

birth' which is a birth 'of the Spirit' (John 3.1-21). There is an echo of the 'New Commandment' given by Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13.34-35

Just as striking as these similarities between Peter's letter and the writings of the Apostle *John* are those where he echoes the Apostle *Paul*. The famous trio of faith and hope and love appear here, just as they do in what might be the most famous verse in all of the writings of St Paul:

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13.13

Meanwhile, the language of Christ's destiny from before the foundation of the world, now revealed for the sake of the 'final ages' is very close to that of the eloquent hymns at the start of both the Letters to the Colossians (1.15-20) and especially that to the Ephesians (1.3-14).

These texts present a visionary sense of how we are held within the unfolding of God's eternal plan, in which our destiny, guaranteed by the coming among us of Jesus Christ, and confirmed through the resurrection, is not in any doubt. This confidence combines with a strong commitment to the continuing conversion within us of all which is broken and corrupt, that we may become 'holy and blameless and irreproachable before God' (cf Colossians 1.22). This moral focus on our continuing self-renewal, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, became the basis of the pattern of life developed by the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the third and fourth centuries – putting into radical practice the call of a resurrection faith to bring forth genuine *renewal of habit* within us. The Desert Elders believe that the faith of the resurrection demands of us a conversion of our base 'passions' of greed and anger and pride and lust, that we conform, instead, to the virtues which mark the Person of Christ – the 'new human' (or we might say the 'renewed human' (cf Ephesians 4.21-24; 2 Corinthians 5.17). The *implication* of the resurrection for us is our own ongoing internal renewal, according to the fruits of the Holy Spirit: of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5.22). May it indeed be so. Alleluia.

The painting of the Lamb of God is by Francisco de Zurbaran (1598-1664)