Christ the First-Born of Creation
(15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Colossians 1:15-20—The Christ-Hymn

[15] He is *the image of the invisible God*, *the first-born of all creation*; [16] for *in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him*. [17] He is *before all things*, and *in him all things hold together*. [18] He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. [19] *For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell*, [20] and *through him to reconcile to himself all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making *peace by the blood of his cross*. (Col 1:15-20)

1. "Hymn of the Son": Paul is quoting an early Christian hymn.
2. Creation:
     a. "all things" (Greek *ta panta*) created "in" him (1:16)
     b. "all things" created "through" him (1:16)
     c. "all things" created "for" him (1:16)
     b. "all things" hold together "in him" (1:17)
3. Christology:
     a. Human: "image (Greek *eikōn*) of the invisible God" (1:15; cf. Gen 1:27-28)
     b. "first-born (Greek *prōtotokos*) of all creation" (1:15)
     c. he is "before all things" (1:17)
     d. he is "the beginning" (1:18)
     e. he is "preeminent" (Greek *prōteuō*) in "everything" (1:18)
     f. Divinity: "the fullness" (Greek *plērōma*) dwells in him (1:19)
     g. Cf. Col 2:19: "the whole fulness of deity (Greek *to plērōma tēs theotētos*)
4. Soteriology: all things "reconciled" "through him" & "the blood of his cross" (1:19-20)
5. Ecclesiology: he is "the head" of "the body," the "church" (1:18)
6. Eschatology: he is "the first-born from the dead" (1:18)

Living Tradition

1. Nestorianism: Nestorius, archbishop of Constantinople divided Christ into *two persons*: a human person (Christ) joined to the divine person (the Son of God).[1]
2. Council of Epheus (A.D. 451), drew on Colossians in confession of faith that the humanity of Christ has no other subject than the one divine person of the Son of God:

We confess the Word to have been made one with the flesh hypostatically, and we adore one Son and Lord, Jesus Christ. We do not divide him into parts and separate man and God in him, as though the two natures were mutually united only through a unity of

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[1] See Susan Wessell, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

dignity and authority; that would be an empty expression and nothing more… But we do not say that the Word of God dwelt as in an ordinary man born of the holy virgin, in order that Christ may not be thought of as a God-bearing man. For even though "the Word dwelt among us" [John 1:14], *and it is also said that in Christ dwelt "all the fullness of the godhead bodily" [Col 2:9], we understand that, having become flesh*, the manner of his indwelling is not defined in the same ways as he is said to dwell among the saints*, he was united by nature* (Greek *henōtheis kata physin*) and not turned into flesh and *he made his indwelling in such a way as we may say that the soul of man does in his own body. There is therefore one Christ and Son and Lord…*[2]

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

1. How does the "Christ-hymn" in Colossians 1 teach that Christ is both human and divine??

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For Further Reading

1. Dennis Hamm, S.J. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013.
2. Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John Kincaid. *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2019.

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[2] Council of Ephesus, "Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius." In in Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:51-52.