



Theology Corner

Vol. 108 – May 17th, 2020

Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Did Christ Only Have One Will or Two?”

Over the course of history, there have been many people who have struggled with the mystery of the Incarnation. One of the areas that the Church has sought to clarify was the nature of the person of Jesus Christ. Whenever we speak of Christ’s nature, we have to consider what we call the *hypostatic union*. This is just a fancy word signifying the union of two natures (human and divine) in one person – Jesus Christ. This union consists of God becoming man, and thereby uniting a human nature to the divine nature. It was not a case in which the divine nature absorbed a human nature, because each nature would not be distinct. But while Jesus Christ is one divine person, he has two substantially united natures. There are many reasons why this information is important, but in this case, the reason you need to know this is because it helps us understand something more with respect to Christ’s will.

Some people have argued that Christ really only had a divine will since everything human in him was moved by the divine will. But this was dogmatically refuted in the 4th century at the Council of Constantinople when it was stated that Christ assumed a perfect human nature. What this means is that Christ, being perfectly human was like us in all things but sin; he had a human intellect, a human will, and human emotions. We see in scripture that Christ himself acknowledges his own human will when he says, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not *my* will but yours be done [emphasis added].” (Luke 22:42). Here, Christ not only acknowledges the two wills, but also shows that his human will is truly subject to the divine will. An interesting thing to consider is that there is a two-fold aspect of his human will. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between the human will of Christ from the aspect of *reason* and from the aspect of *sensuality*. The first aspect can be understood this way: consider the fact that the human will chooses based on what the intellect knows, since one cannot will that which one does not know. But due to the union of natures in Christ, his human intellect is informed by the divine intellect, and so he *knows* with absolute certainty all that is good. For this reason, Christ’s will is always in harmony with the divine will being that he will always choose what he knows to be good. Whereas with us, sometimes we choose things that are not truly good for us, but only *apparently* good. This does not mean that Christ’s human will was not free, but that he freely chose to always do the good based on what he knew.

But from the aspect of Christ’s human will of sensuality, the human will could tend away from what God willed. For example, his human will from this aspect shies away from his passion and death. In other words, he still experiences a hesitation on part of his human nature, fearing the pain and suffering that was going to come during his trial, punishment, and crucifixion. To be clear, this fear of pain and suffering could not have been a result of a lack of knowledge of what was to come, but simply a natural fear of the human experience of pain and suffering. This is precisely what Christ meant when he said, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt. 26:41). Thus, when he says. “not my will, but yours be done” he is subduing his will of sensuality to the will of reason so as to fight against the natural human tendency to avoid pain and suffering.

This gives us a lot for which to relate. When we pray the Lord’s prayer, in saying “thy will be done” we too are asking to subdue our will of sensuality to withstand any hardships we may undergo for the sake of the Lord. Imagine the deep prayer that the martyrs of our faith had! Where we differ from Christ is in our will of reason. Recall that Christ always chose in accordance with the divine will because of his divine knowledge. We sometimes fail in this regard, because *our* knowledge can only be made perfect by an acceptance of the gift of faith to perfect our intellect and an acceptance of the gift of charity to perfect our will. These gifts must be given from the Holy Spirit, but they also have to be freely *accepted* by us. This can be a difficult task at times, but that is why prayer is so important. We have to prepare ourselves for these graces in the similar manner that Christ prepared his human will in the garden of Gethsemane for the mission he was to accomplish soon thereafter.