

EVANGELION
The Power of God

Fr. Deacon Ezra

Chapter 2
IN THE IMAGE & LIKENESS OF GOD

St. Elijah Orthodox Church
15000 N. May Ave
Oklahoma City, OK

© Fr Deacon Ezra 2015

CHAPTER 2

IN THE IMAGE & LIKENESS OF GOD

Genesis 1:26 tells us that God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. The “Us” is Trinity. Let me share with you what various Fathers of the Eastern Church have said regarding the creation of humans. Please keep in mind, “A Christian has no right to separate, even in thought, the One and the Three when he speaks of God.”¹

“US” AND TRINITY

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394) *On the Origin of Man*²

This same language was not used for (the creation) of other things. The command was simple when light was created; God said, “let there be light.” Heaven was also made without deliberation.... These, though, were before the creation of humans. For humans, there was deliberation. He did not say, as he did when creating other things, “Let there be a human.” See how worthy you are! Your origins are not in an imperative. Instead God deliberated about the best way to bring to life a creation worthy of honor.

SPEAKING OF “OUR”

Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533) *To Peter on the Faith*³

Therefore let us hold that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are by nature one God; neither is the Father the one who is the Son, nor the Son the one who is the Father, nor the Holy Spirit the one who is the Father or the Son.

¹ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 21.

² Hadwiga Horner, ed. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera Supplementum*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 5-6, 8.

³ Fulgentius of Ruspe, *To Peter on the Faith*, *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Washington, D.C., (Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 95:63.

For the essence, that which the Greeks call the *ousia*, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, in which the essence of the Father is not one thing and the Son a second thing and the Holy Spirit still a third thing, although in person the Father is different, the Son is different, and the Holy Spirit is different.

[Note: Fulgentius of Ruspe is reminding us that we must be careful with our metaphors when speaking of the Trinity. The Trinity is first and foremost—a Mystery. Someone recently said the Trinity is like a Snickers candy bar—with peanuts, chocolate and nougat. But that’s false. That’s a collection of three separate items. The essence of peanuts is different from the essence of chocolate which in turn is different from the essence of nougat. The Trinity is one in essence.]

Fulgentius of Ruspe continues:

All of this is demonstrated for us in the strongest fashion at the very beginning of the Holy Scriptures, when God says, “Let us make human beings in our image and likeness.”

When, using the singular number, he says “image,” he shows that the nature is one, in whose image the human being was made.

But when he says “our” in the plural, he shows that the very same God in whose image the human being was made is not one in person.

For if in that one essence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit there were one person, “to our image” would not have been spoken but “in my image.”

Nor would he have said, “let us make” but “I shall make.”

[That is, he would have said, “I shall make man in my image.”]

If in reality in those three persons three substances were to be understood or believed, “to our image” would not have been said; rather, “to our images”; for there could not be one image of three unequal natures.

...Scripture thus told of the making of the human being by saying, “And God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN IMAGE AND LIKENESS

Origen (185-253) *On First Principles*⁴

In recording the first creation of man, Moses [in Genesis] before all others says, “And God said, Let us make man in our own image and likeness.” Then afterwards, “And God made man; in the image of God made he him; male and female made he them, and he blessed them.”

Now the fact that he said “he made him in the image of God” and was silent about the likeness points to nothing else but this, that man received the honor of God’s image in his first creation, whereas the perfection of God’s likeness was reserved for him at the consummation.

The purpose of this was that man should acquire it [the likeness] for himself by his own earnest efforts to imitate God, so that while the possibility of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning through the honor of the “image,” he should in the end through the accomplishment of these works obtain for himself the perfect “likeness.”

⁴ Origen, *On First Principles*, translated by G. W. Butterworth, (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 244.

Diadochus of Photice (c. 450) *On Spiritual Perfection*⁵

All men are made in God's image; but to be in his likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God. For only when we do not belong to ourselves do we become like him who through love has reconciled us to himself. No one achieves this unless he persuades his soul not to be distracted by the false glitter of this life.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394) *On the Origin of Man*⁶

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." We possess the one by creation; we acquire the other by free will. In the first structure it is given us to be born in the image of God; by free will there is formed in us the being in the likeness of God...

"Let us make man in our image": let him possess by creation what is in the image, but let him also become according to the likeness.

God has given the power for this. If he had created you also in the likeness, where would your privilege be? Why have you been crowned? And if the Creator had given you everything, how would the kingdom of heaven have opened for you?

But it is proper that one part is given you, while the other has been left incomplete: this is so that you might complete it yourself and might be worthy of the reward which comes from God.

⁵ Diocoehus of Photice, *On Spiritual Perfection* in H. de Lubac, J. Danielou et al, eds. Sources Chretiennes, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941), 5:86

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Origin of Man*, 10.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

We were created in the image of God. We were also created with likeness-ability, the ability to become like those with whom we are around and spend time with. God created us so that he could spend time with us, and we with him. He also created us with likeness-ability that, as we spent time with him, we would begin to become like him. The purpose of life, the purpose of creation, is for each of us to become like God, to become godlike.

Becoming godlike is a process that takes place little by little as we spend time with God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ tells us that we are to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.⁷ Unfortunately this is a poor translation of what Christ said.

The English term *perfect* carries a moral tone. It implies without flaws, without a mistake. We say that a skater whose routine had no flaws, or a musical student who played the recital piece without a mistake, we say their performance was perfect. Therefore when we hear Christ telling us to be perfect, we ultimately shrug it off and ignore these words because we know we have flaws, we mess up, and we make mistakes. We think these words of Christ are out of our reach.

But the word translated *perfect* is the word *complete*. Jesus is really saying, Be complete, even as your heavenly Father is complete. Each one of us is an unfinished work of art. We are a work in progress. Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, is reminding us of our purpose. He is reminding us of the goal of our life. We are not finished. We have not yet attained our purpose. We have not yet reached our goal. We have not yet become like God.

⁷ Matthew 5:48

LIKENESS-ABILITY AND FREE WILL

Becoming like God is a choice. It is a choice we make. We possess likeness-ability, the ability to become like those we are around. We know we have likeness-ability, that's why every parent is so concerned with whom his children are around. We're afraid our kids will end up becoming like those other kids.

We also possess free will. We can choose our friends. We can choose with whom we run around. We can choose to whom we listen.

God is not mad at us. He is not angry at us. We've stalled out. He is jump-starting the process. He tells us, "Be perfect. Be complete like I'm complete. Spend time with me until you become complete like me."

We are the only species that carries the image of God in us. All creation is marked with the "fingerprints" of God.⁸ But we are the only species specifically made in his image. Every one of us, by carrying the image of God within, already has the ability to become complete like God.

The old song says, "I don't care where you've been sleeping. I don't care who's made your bed."⁹ Those are just choices. We can choose where we're sleeping. And we can choose with whom. We can also choose to walk with God.

⁸ There is a relationship between the Logos by whom all things were created and the logoi of all things that have been created. See St. Maximus the Confessor, "The Logos and the logoi" [1077C], *Ambigua to John*, 7 in *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library volume 29,, Maximus the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 95-111.

⁹ Lyrics by Don Francisco. It's a song sung by the father praying his son will come home in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Let me say it again. God is not angry at us. Our choices do not hurt him. They hurt us and those around us. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved”¹⁰ — might be given the power to walk with God and become complete like God—to become the children of God.¹¹

They threw the lady caught in adultery in the dirt in front of Jesus.¹² Their fists were clinched around rocks, ready to tear flesh and kill her. She was only the bait used to set a trap for Christ. He loved the angry mob the same as he loved the humiliated lady at his feet. They had all forgotten who they were, and what they had been created to become. To paraphrase Jesus, he reminded them they too were incomplete when he said, “Those of you who look like God can throw the first stone.” The mob melted away. The accusers were gone. Jesus told the lady, “I do not condemn you.” God did not come to condemn us — he came to rescue us.

We have forgotten who we are. We have forgotten why we were created in the first place. Christ did not come to condemn but, like a mother reminds her wayward child that he was not raised this way, so too Christ reminds us he did not create us this way. He did not create us to wander around aimlessly. He created us for the purpose of becoming like him. We are the special species. We carry the image of God. We have been given free will. Choose God. Choose to walk with God. You will begin to look like God. You will begin to look like Trinity. And God will look at you and begin to see himself in you. You will become a child of God, and you will look like Trinity.

¹⁰ John 3:17

¹¹ John 1: 12; Romans 8:16

¹² John 8:3-11

FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN

In the Incarnation Christ was fully God and fully Man. Christ is the Second Adam. He is who Adam was to have become had Adam not abandoned the purpose of his creation.¹³ Like Adam we are created with likeness-ability, the ability to become like whomever we spend time with. As we walk with God in the cool of the evening, we will begin to be like God.

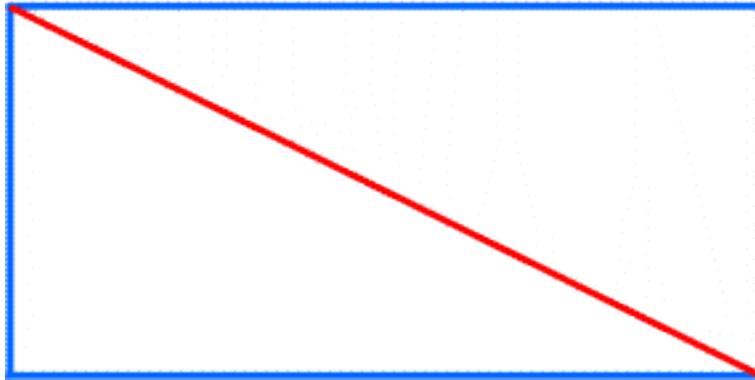
Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the evening.¹⁴ This evening walk was not an academic event filled with abstract academic debate. Their daily walk was an existential event filled with practical consequence—they literally were becoming like God. Likewise for us, our walking with God in the cool of the evening is not academic or theoretically theological. Our daily walk with God is existential and practical. We literally are becoming like God as we walk with him.

In the West, when we think about being like God, we think about being spiritual. In the West to be like God is to be less human and more spiritual. We associate sin with the body, with our humanity, and we associate being holy with being less bodily, less human.

¹³ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NT: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 133.

¹⁴ Genesis 3:8

Spirituality in the West



But Christ was not less human. He was fully God and fully Man.¹⁵ To become like God means to become like Christ. Our humanity is not what it was before the Fall. We are less than who we were created to be in our humanity.¹⁶ In becoming like Christ, we begin to grow in our humanity. Our original humanity begins to be restored to us. We are not yet fully human. As we walk with God in the cool of the evening, our humanity is restored. It is in becoming fully human that we open the way to becoming like God.

Let me speak plainly. My family does not care how “spiritual” I become. They don’t care how many hours a day I pray or mediate. They do not care whether I have heavenly visions. They do, however, care deeply about what kind of husband and father I am. They care whether I am gentle and tender with them, and whether I am genuinely concerned about them and their lives.

They care whether I am compassionate and considerate towards them. They particularly care

¹⁵ “The idea of *theosis* does not involve the absorption of creation by divine nature... [The Council of] Chalcedon safeguards divine and human otherness by insisting that the two natures in Christ remained always ‘without confusion’. Thus, Christology sanctions otherness in a fundamental way.” John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 37.

¹⁶ Having been created out of nothing, Adam’s choice of death returned him and all mankind close to nothingness, a state which Vladimir Lossky said “was near a state of non-being.” Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 135.

how I respond to their mistakes. How forgiving am I? What kind of listener am I? What does it really mean when I say, I love you.

If my spending time with God makes me a better husband, a better father, a better friend, and a better person, then my spending time with God makes a difference in every relationship I have. I'm even nicer and compassionate to the store clerk that I do not know—the store clerk who obviously is new and doesn't know how to make change. It is in becoming fully human that becoming like God becomes possible.

At its heart “walking with God in the cool of the evening” is to have an active relationship with God. The how and where one “walks with God” is established and agreed upon between God and each person. Praying, reading Scripture, attending Liturgy and other services, going on spiritual retreats and participation in other religious activities are important, have their place, and *may* actually be where we have an encounter with God. They also *may* be how and where we keep our appointment to walk with God. They also *may* be little more than activities carried out in the name of God but within which no actual contact with God occurs.

We must be on guard against “cheap pseudo-spirituality... But, alas, people enjoy cheapness, as long as it is covered with beards, crosses, and comfortable words.”¹⁷ Some are drawn to the Orthodox Faith by the icons and incense and never enter into the spiritual reality to which they bear witness. Attracted only by the external, they never turn aside to see and hear “the ineffable and supernatural divine fire” burning before them “as if in a burning bush.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann* (SVS Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, 10.262a in *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* volume 28,,

Religious activity for the sake of religious activity is not the same as having a relationship with God. As has often been said, going to church does not make us like God any more than sleeping in a garage makes us a car.

In the same way that the Sabbath was made for man, religious activity was also made for us—to provide a place and opportunity for our relationship with God to begin and grow. Any religious activity that does not at its heart promote becoming like God is exactly only that—religious activity.

“Whatever is given to man, which does not have *theosis* [becoming like God] as its ultimate end, is unworthy of him; it devalues both those who give it and those who receive it.”¹⁹

BECOMING WHO GOD MEANT US TO BE

It is God in whom “we live and move and have our being.”²⁰ God is the source of all existence and, therefore, he is the source of our personal existence.

Elder Thaddeus says, “Everything, both good and evil, comes from our thoughts. Our thoughts become reality. Even today we can see that all of creation, everything that exists on the earth and in the cosmos, is nothing but Divine thought made material in time and space.”²¹

Maximus the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua, vol. 1, edited and translated by Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 233.

¹⁹ See Archimandrite Vasilieos of Iveron, *The Thunderbolt of Ever-Living Fire*, 99.

²⁰ Acts 17:28

²¹ Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2011), 63.

Think of it—*everything that exists on the earth and in the cosmos, is nothing but Divine thought made material in time and space.*

God is — ο ων — and is the cause and source of all existence. Only God has immortality.²² It is God who gives life to all things.²³ God speaks his thought and it is. It materializes in space and time. But that which materializes does not possess in itself absolute existence. Existence is on loan to us.²⁴ That which materializes merely participates in existence. It is an existential manifestation of the thought. If the thought ceases to be thought, the manifestation of the thought ceases to exist as well.²⁵

God is no watchmaker god of Deism, a god who wound up the world like a clock and then departed to let the cosmos tick-tock all by itself. God is the source, and the continued source, the sustaining source of the existence of all that exists. Without God undergirding creation, creation ceases.²⁶

God is at the center of his creation, calling into existence all that is, and sustaining all that is, by continually thinking its existence.

²² 1 Timothy 6:16

²³ 1 Timothy 6:13

²⁴ St Maximus the Confessor, *Commentary on The Our Father*, 4. Thy Kingdom Come, in *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* in The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 111.

²⁵ The Christian doctrine of Creation in which God creates *ex nihilo* (creates out of nothing) has always been at odds with classical Greek philosophy in which God and the world share their existence by virtue of their participation in being itself. Creation *ex nihilo* which assumes nothing can come out of nothing implies a difference between God's existence and the world's existence. "Between God and the world there is total ontological otherness: God's being is uncreated, while that of the world is created, that is, contingent." John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 17. My comments are an effort metaphorically to express this *contingency*. For the Church Fathers, this world is perishable, "having come out of nothing, it could return to nothing and perish." Ibid, 18.

²⁶ Bowers and Wilkens, Introduction, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: St Maximus the Confessor*, 20. The "incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity in Jesus of Nazareth holds the secret to the foundations—the architectural *logoi*—of the created cosmos...."

God is at the center of all that is.²⁷ His thoughts, going outward in every direction, create. In the scientific world there are invisible neutrinos that pass unnoticed through our bodies by the billions every second. Like invisible neutrinos, God's thought permeates and sustains all creation. God is invisible uncreated light whose light shines outward in all directions permeating and sustaining all that is.

CALLED INTO EXISTENCE BY GOD

Each of us exists because God thought us and called us into existence. God is not behind us. He is in front of us, calling us by name, calling us to come to him, to *be-come* to him. It is not on the basis "of someone's past or present that we should identify and accept him or her, but on the basis of their *future*. And since the future lies only in the hands of God"²⁸ who others will become, who we will become, still lies ahead of us and not behind us.

St. Paul says that he was set apart and *called* while he was still in his mother's womb. But he did not know who he was called to be and who he was called to proclaim until his adult life when an act of revelation by the Father revealed the Son to him.²⁹ God was in front of a baby named Saul and *called* him into the future to become who he really was—St. Paul.

²⁷ Metaphorically speaking since God has no "where." See St Maximus the Confessor, *Ad Thalassium* 61 in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Christ* (SVS Press, 2003), 142. See also St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, 10.26 and 10.38 in *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* volume 28,, *Maximus the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 243 and 293.

²⁸ John D. Ziziouolos, *Communion & Otherness*, 6.

²⁹ Galatians 1:15-16

We physically generate and give birth to children, but it is God who has called them into being.

“You took hold of me from my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”³⁰ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.”³¹

We think our children exist because of us. We name them and then watch them grow up. We watch them become who they are, or think they are. But we exist and our children exist because God thought us and them and called each of us by name.³²

My parents named me Herb after my father, and I was called Mike. But when I became Orthodox I was drawn to the name of the Old Testament prophet Ezra. It is as if when God first thought of me, he didn’t think Herb or Mike. He thought *Ezra*, the fully “grown up” me, the completed process, the person he intended when he spoke my name. I took, what for me, was a new name, but it was the name God had called me from the beginning.³³ Or should I say—the name God calls me from the future. We are not defined by our past. We are defined by our future.³⁴

Generically speaking, each of us is created to become like God, to acquire God-likeness. But in a more specific sense, each of us is created to become who we are, to become whom God thinks of when he thinks of us—when he thinks of Ezra, Kathryn, John, Ignatius, Matthew, Sherrie,

³⁰ Psalms 138: 13-14 OSB

³¹ Jeremiah 1:5

³² Isaiah 43:1

³³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, 10.20a in *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* volume 28., *Maximus the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Nicholas Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 217. As Melchizedek, we should be known by what we become and not by what we left behind.

³⁴ Maximus the Confessor in John D. Ziziouolos, *Communion & Otherness*, 67.

Tamara or James. We are created to become a specific— unique and non-repeatable person.³⁵
 “Each one of us has his or her own name.”³⁶

BECOMING LIKE GOD IS PERSONAL

Theosis, becoming like God, is therefore not generic. It is personal. Our becoming like God is in actuality our materializing in space and time, in our own lives, who God meant when he thought you and me and called us into existence.

God thought, said *Light* — and there was light. God thought, said, and it was. God thought us and through the generative act of our parents, we are. But our existence is not our own. We exist because God calls us, thinks us, into existence. He said *Light* and Light was. But when God said *John, Mary*, they began the process of becoming John and Mary. The speed at which Light became Light was instantaneous. To us, John becoming John is not instantaneous. It is a process of becoming John.

Because of the Fall (because of Adam’s rejection of becoming like the image of God within him) we think we already are. We think this is who we are. We are unaware we have not yet become who we are becoming.

God stands in front of us—calling us into existence—calling us out of nothing towards him.³⁷

The closer we get to God the more we become who he called us to be when he first called us by

³⁵ John D. Zizoulas, *Being as Communion*, 49.

³⁶ Archimandrite Vasileios of Iveron, *The Thunderbolt of Ever-Living Fire*, 15.

³⁷ “God draws [us] to himself.” St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, 10.20a in *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* volume 28,, *Maximus the Confessor: On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua*, vol. 1, edited

name. God calls us from the future—calls us in to the future to become who we will be in the future.³⁸

It's as if we each exist along a ray of light that shines outward from God. It is a light—a tractor beam--that draws us homeward towards God. I speak metaphorically. Our life is a journey along that ray of light taking us towards fully materializing who God intended when he called us by name.

This ray of light is invisible. When we wander from it, we stray from materializing who God thinks us to become. Sometimes we cross back and forth across the beam of light, and, for those moments we are in the beam, we glimpse who we are; that is, we glimpse who we are meant to be.

This lightning flash is related to being called by name. “This calling by name is a mystical lightning flash that illumines the unknown depths and breadths of human existence. Only hearing your own name from him who loves you, who is love and *through whom all things were made*—it is this alone that gives you real existence. It honors you; it makes you a person with a unique name and leads you out into the land of the living. You become aware of who you are and what you are called to become.”³⁹

and translated by Nicholas Constat (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 215, and 10.51, 343.

³⁸ John D. Zizioulos, *Communion & Otherness*, 6, 18, 67.

³⁹ Archimandrite Vasileios of Iveron, *The Thunderbolt of Ever-Living Fire*, (Sebastian Press, 2014), 58.

We are God's creation. We are his thoughts materialized in space and time. The me that I am, even though not yet fully materialized, the me that I will be, is the me God thought when he called me into existence. I do not own my existence. I do not possess my existence. Existence is on loan to me,⁴⁰ and I participate in existence. My life is a gift that includes the gift to be aware that I exist, and exist as a materialized expression of God's thought.

We have free will. We can claim our existence as our own and live according to whoever we think we are. "After all, it's my life, and I can do with it what I want" is our rebellious claim.

Or we can fall down before God in worship and give thanks for living. We can give thanks for who God thought us to be when he called us by name. We can embrace the journey of achieving, of becoming, of materializing in space and time who God intended when he called each of us by name.

Each of us is sustained, again I speak metaphorically, by an invisible ray of light as God continues to think and call us by name. The journey of materializing, manifesting and becoming who God intended when he called us by name is the journey of *theosis*. How much more like God can we be than when we have become all he intended — all he thought — when he called us by name?

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10

The issue of becoming who God meant when he called us by name is not a numerical scale at all. When God said *Light* — instantaneously there was Light, finished and complete. It is what it is.

⁴⁰ Maximus the Confessor, *Commentary on The Our Father* in *Classics of Western Spirituality*, 111.

It is what God thought when he thought *Light*. Transfer that to us. God created us with Free Will, which means we get a vote. This means we are not instantaneously who God thought when he thought each of us. There is a process involved, a process of becoming to which we give our assent, our Amen, and embrace with joy and excitement discovering who we really are, which we won't know until we have become it—until we have become our future.

There is no numerical scale that says I am to be an 8 and you a 9 or 10. Creation cannot be judged. God said it is good. Whatever the finished product/person is to be, is good. We are all equally good.

However, in the meantime we are in the process of becoming. On a scale of 1 – 10, the number 10 represents each person's goal line. We have not yet crossed our finish line. We have all “fallen short” of the goal line.⁴¹ But we are headed there. We cannot judge ourselves and our progress against another's progress. We each are running our own race, and encouraging one another as we race, for we do not race against each other. We race to cross the finish line, finally to become who we are, and have been, and were always created to be. This is what we mean by *theosis*. This is what becoming like God means. *Theosis* is not abstract. It is personal. How much more like God can we be than when we have become all he intended—all he thought—when he called us by name?

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

You are who God said you were when he first spoke your name. But since the Fall we are each born blind, blind to who we are. All inanimate things are, but all living things become. An

⁴¹ St. Paul speaks of this in Romans 3:23.

acorn *is* an oak, but it must become who it is. This is also true for us humans. But we are each born blind and deaf. At least an acorn *knows* it is an oak — and becomes who it is. But not us. We think we are who *we* think we are. But we keep changing who *we* think we are. We are this for a while, and then we are that. Next we are something else entirely different. Not knowing who we are, we can never find ourselves, never become an oak.

When the angels went to Sodom to rescue Lot and his family, the angels struck the men of Sodom blind so that they could not attack Lot’s doorway. “And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves trying to find the doorway.”⁴²

In my own blindness, I too have often “wearied myself trying to find the doorway” to my life, the doorway to who I was, and who I was to be.

Occasionally I crossed into the light and almost got a fleeting glimpse at who I was — almost. In my 40s I was drawn to Ezra 7: 10 “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”⁴³ (NASV). I even started something called *Ezra Bible Ministries* and “wearied myself trying to find the doorway.” Our son Amos was born in 1987 and Jakob in 1988. I even considered naming one of them, Ezra. But somehow I knew that name had something to do with me, not them.⁴⁴

⁴² Genesis 19:11 NASV

⁴³ Ezra 7:10 in a Protestant Bible.

⁴⁴ Lots of parents make the mistake of trying to live their lives through their children—trying to have them become what we ourselves did not become. But each child has free will and is being called forward to become who they are to be.

This was also when we bumped into the Orthodox Church. When I was chrismated, I received the name, Ezra, for myself. Soon I did some teaching in the church, a Bible Study on Wednesday mornings and then one of the Inquirer's classes and then two.

All that changed when I was ordained a subdeacon in February 2000. My private Eucharistic name became the very public Subdeacon, and later, Deacon Ezra. I have been teaching the Inquirer's classes as well as being asked to teach classes at a university ever since my private Eucharistic name became public. I became Ezra the teacher. Everyone else had always seen me to be a teacher. But I had never known that I was a teacher.

Being a teacher is an external becoming. Growing in the revelation of God is a continual growing, continually becoming Ezra externally and internally.

I thank God that I became who I was meant to be while there was still time left in my life to be it. I don't mean just being a teacher as a vocation. I mean being who I am. This is who I am. I am Ezra. I have always been Ezra. Thank God I found out I was Ezra while there was still time to be Ezra—that is, while there was still time left to do the stuff that Ezra was meant to do all along.

Become who you are. There are many Toms, Marys, Johns and Georges. But there is only one you. You are unique and unrepeatable. You are the one God meant when he called you by name. Don't weary yourself looking for the doorway. You carry the image of God within.

Become who you are. Become the giant oak within your name.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Melkizedek became his name. He was "to be named from the things by which he voluntarily transformed himself. [and] we should not characterize by the property of the things they have abandoned, but rather to name them from the magnificence of what they have assumed, for which and in which alone, henceforth, they exist and are known." St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, 10.20a in *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* volume 29., *Maximus*

