

“[He] sacrificed Himself as a ransom for them all,”

1 Tim 2:6

I suppose, when we think of someone being ransomed, we think of prisoners during the Crusades being set free, or pirates being paid bags of gold, or in our own day, members of wealthy families being kidnapped. In each case, the money is paid to the bad guy so that the good guy can be set free. However, the bad guy gets all the loot and makes a clean get-away. Meanwhile, the good guy, although he gets his loved-one back, is vastly out of pocket. True, a prisoner is set free, but we cannot really say that there has been a proper resolution to the problem. Justice has not been served.

So, when we come to the work of Our Lord, things don't seem to make sense. Who is the good guy and who is the bad guy? Who pays the ransom and to whom is it paid? Is God paying a ransom to the devil to get him to release a captive human race? Does the Son of God become the bag of gold? In which case, doesn't Christ now belong to Satan? Before we get too carried away, we need to make it very clear indeed that God owes the devil nothing whatsoever. God does not pay a ransom to Satan. Lucifer does not get away with all the loot. So, what *is* going on when St Paul talks about Jesus being the ransom for us all?

We have to remember, first, that justice is the virtue by which we give to others what we owe them; second, God does not owe anyone anything; third, all of God's creatures owe God everything.

We also have to remember that it is in God's nature that He gives: He does not take. Certainly, we often use the language of taking. In the Book of Job, for example, we read the famous line, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away' (Job 1:21). But it would contradict God's nature as 'the-One-who-gives' if He were to take back any of the gifts He had once

given. So, although we see the loss of something God has given us as if God were taking it away again, in fact it is a case of a damaged nature simply running its course, or of our having forfeited a gift by our own wrongdoing.

When it comes to the original sin of Adam and of Christ's work of redemption, the same thing applies. God did not *take* sanctifying grace from Adam's soul, nor did He take away from Adam and Eve their place in paradise. Instead, by sinning, Adam *forfeited* the gift of sanctifying grace, and he forfeited his place in the Garden of Eden. And because Adam held various gifts on behalf of the whole human race, he forfeited these same gifts on behalf of us all. The gifts were forfeited, not lost or taken away – the vocabulary is terribly important – these gifts were forfeited by Adam so that they fell back, as it were, into God's keeping.

Mere human beings cannot buy back these gifts from God because we, as individuals and collectively as a race, are incapable of giving to the Father a gift that is big enough – worthy enough – to make up for our having turned our backs on Him in the first place. Instead, it takes someone who is both God and Man to do this.

Our Lord is Man, so we may say that His death on the Cross is truly offered by and on behalf of the human race. Our Lord is also God, so His death has not just a worthwhile value, it has an *infinite* value, and is therefore great enough (*more* than great enough) to make up for the sins by which we have offended God.

In the process, Our Lord buys back from God, as it were, the gifts that Adam as the father of our race had forfeited back into the keeping of God when he committed the original sin. But we – each and every one of us – have contributed to the human race's alienation from its Creator, and therefore Christ, on the Cross, was buying back the gifts that we, too, had had a hand in forfeiting. Chiefly, the Son of God was buying back from the Father the gift of life which we had forfeited by committing sins which led to death. The gifts

were bought back; medicine was applied to our souls; sanctifying life was once again given to mere human beings; and sins were washed away. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

This was the ransom that Our Lord was paying: not a ransom to the devil, but a buying back from the Father a whole series of gifts which the Father had – and has – always willed us to have but which we had thrown back in His face. We do not deserve to be set free from our prison of darkness and everlasting death. Nonetheless, Christ our Saviour has bought back on our behalf the gift of life that the Father has been only too willing to bestow on His creatures if only they would turn to Him once more and give to Him what they owe Him. And the human race, in the Person of Jesus Christ Our Lord, has done exactly that on our behalf.