

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ was not the first to rise from the dead, because we read in the Old Testament of some persons raised to life by Elias and Eliseus, according to Heb. 11:35: “Women received their dead raised to life again”: also Christ before His Passion raised three dead persons to life. Therefore Christ was not the first to rise from the dead.

Objection 2. Further, among the other miracles which happened during the Passion, it is narrated (Mat. 27:52) that “the monuments were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had slept rose again.” Therefore Christ was not the first to rise from the dead.

Objection 3. Further, as Christ by His own rising is the cause of our resurrection, so by His grace He is the cause of our grace, according to Jn. 1:16: “Of His fulness we all have received.” But in point of time some others had grace previous to Christ—for instance all the fathers of the Old Testament. Therefore some others came to the resurrection of the body before Christ.

On the contrary, It is written (1 Cor. 15:20): “Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep—because,” says the gloss, “He rose first in point of time and dignity.”

I answer that, Resurrection is a restoring from death to life. Now a man is snatched from death in two ways: first of all, from actual death, so that he begins in any way to live anew after being actually dead: in another way, so that he is not only rescued from death, but from the necessity, nay more, from the possibility of dying again. Such is a true and perfect resurrection, because so long as a man lives, subject to the necessity of dying, death has dominion over him in a measure, according to Rom. 8:10: “The body indeed is dead because of sin.” Furthermore, what has the possibility of existence, is said to exist in some respect, that is, in potentiality. Thus it is evident that the resurrection, whereby one is rescued from actual death only, is but an imperfect one.

Consequently, speaking of perfect resurrection, Christ is the first of them who rise, because by rising He was the first to attain life utterly immortal, according to Rom. 6:9: “Christ rising from the dead dieth now no more.” But by an imperfect resurrection, some others have risen before Christ, so as to be a kind of figure of His Resurrection.

And thus the answer to the first objection is clear: because both those raised from the dead in the old Testament, and those raised by Christ, so returned to life that they had to die again.

Reply to Objection 2. There are two opinions re-

garding them who rose with Christ. Some hold that they rose to life so as to die no more, because it would be a greater torment for them to die a second time than not to rise at all. According to this view, as Jerome observes on Mat. 27:52,53, we must understand that “they had not risen before our Lord rose.” Hence the Evangelist says that “coming out of the tombs after His Resurrection, they came into the holy city, and appeared to many.” But Augustine (Ep. ad Evod. clxiv) while giving this opinion, says: “I know that it appears some, that by the death of Christ the Lord the same resurrection was bestowed upon the righteous as is promised to us in the end; and if they slept not again by laying aside their bodies, it remains to be seen how Christ can be understood to be ‘the first-born of the dead,’ if so many preceded Him unto that resurrection. Now if reply be made that this is said by anticipation, so that the monuments be understood to have been opened by the earthquake while Christ was still hanging on the cross, but that the bodies of the just did not rise then but after He had risen, the difficulty still arises—how is it that Peter asserts that it was predicted not of David but of Christ, that His body would not see corruption, since David’s tomb was in their midst; and thus he did not convince them, if David’s body was no longer there; for even if he had risen soon after his death, and his flesh had not seen corruption, his tomb might nevertheless remain. Now it seems hard that David from whose seed Christ is descended, was not in that rising of the just, if an eternal rising was conferred upon them. Also that saying in the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:40) regarding the ancient just would be hard to explain, ‘that they should not be perfected without us,’ if they were already established in that incorruption of the resurrection which is promised at the end when we shall be made perfect”: so that Augustine would seem to think that they rose to die again. In this sense Jerome also in commenting on Matthew (27:52,53) says: “As Lazarus rose, so also many of the bodies of the saints rose, that they might bear witness to the risen Christ.” Nevertheless in a sermon for the Assumption* he seems to leave the matter doubtful. But Augustine’s reasons seem to be much more cogent.

Reply to Objection 3. As everything preceding Christ’s coming was preparatory for Christ, so is grace a disposition for glory. Consequently, it behooved all things appertaining to glory, whether they regard the soul, as the perfect fruition of God, or whether they regard the body, as the glorious resurrection, to be first in Christ as the author of glory: but that grace should be first in those that were ordained unto Christ.

* Ep. ix ad Paul. et Eustoch.; among the supposititious works ascribed to St. Jerome