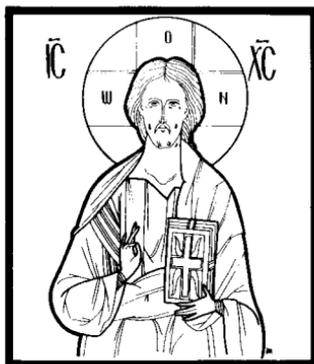


Chapter 10



Christ Pantocrator

One of the most typical and most meaningful symbols of our Church is the icon of Christ Pantocrator, the Lord Omnipotent, that appears in the dome of most Orthodox Churches. It is the image of the glorified Christ reigning on His heavenly throne.

In the catacombs, the underground tombs where the early Christians worshipped, Christ was depicted as the Good Shepherd Who protected His flock. In an age where the Huns, the Vandals, and the Mohammedans threatened the very fabric of the newly established Church, the early Christians needed an emphasis on the Almighty God Who sat enthroned as Emperor, Monarch, Ruler, surrounded by His heavenly court of saints and angels and Who dominated His flock. It is something similar to the emphasis we find in the beautiful hymn:

*‘This is my Father’s world:
Though the wrong seems oft’ so strong,
He is the ruler yet.’*

Based On “Revelation”

The word “Pantocrator” and the idea behind it appear in the book of Revelation. We hear God saying in Rev. 1:18, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord Who is, and Who was, and

Who is to come, the Pantocrator (Almighty).” The use of the multi-colored band that we usually see around the figure of the Pantocrator in the dome is based on Rev. 4:3 where the iris or rainbow is said to surround the throne of God “. . . and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald.”

Normally, the icon of Christ Pantocrator is the most remote of all the conventional poses, Christ is distant from us, and sometimes His face is stern. Yet in Serbia we find an icon of the Pantocrator with dancing eyes. His face is sharp, His mouth tiny with the effort of suppressing a smile, his fingers thin and dancing, where they hold the book. The Gospel book is closed, but Jesus knows what is inside: the good news of God’s love, of the destruction of sin and death, of life everlasting. hence the smile on His face.

The Entire Church Present

It is noteworthy that the highest point of the Church is reserved for our Lord. His Mother and all the other saints, angels and prophets are depicted on the walls immediately below the Pantocrator. Finally, the floor level of the Church is reserved for us—the members of the Church militant. Thus around the figure of Christ in the dome is gathered His entire Church both that in heaven as symbolized by the saints in the icons and that on earth as expressed by the presence of the living members. This gives expression to our faith that at each liturgy, the entire Church is present; those who have passed on into the other life as well as ourselves. That is why we take the opportunity to remember our departed loved ones in memorial prayers. As part of the Church Triumphant they are present at each liturgy, where the entire Church—that in heaven and that on earth—merges and comes together to glorify and sing praises to the Risen Christ, the Pantocrator.

Victory of Christ

The figure of the Pantocrator in the dome serves to express also the victory of Christ’s Resurrection which is so central to our Orthodox Christian faith. It is to dramatize this victory that the figure of Christ is placed at the highest point of the Church, giving full expression to the great victory hymn of the early Church as

quoted by Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “He (Jesus) emptied Himself taking the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. . . . Therefore God has highly exalted Him (lifted Him up) and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:7-11).

His Eyes Upon Us

One of the reasons the Pantocrator is suspended over us in the dome is to remind us of His all-pervading presence in the universe as we come to worship Him. His presence, especially in Church, hovers over us as we pray together. He hovers above us listening to our prayers. Just as a mother cannot take her eyes off her children, so His eyes are upon each of us. He looks down and sees not only who is present in the congregation but also who is absent. One of His greatest heartaches must be to see how many of His children do not come to be with Him on His day, *Kyriaki*, the Day of the Lord. On any given Sunday more than two-thirds of His people are absent from worship. How many times He must have heard all the lame excuses I so often hear as a priest: “I may not come to Church, but I worship God at home every day.” I cannot imagine a person who really worships God at home every day, *not* coming to church on Sunday to be with his Lord, to consummate his love by receiving Jesus in the Sacrament of Communion. We worship God truly not only with our tongue but also with our feet. If our heart is in the right place, it will propel our feet each Sunday to be in the right place.

I have discovered that the easiest person in the world to deceive is oneself—and the devil really helps us here. There are people who think they are still Christians when they seldom if ever come to the liturgy on Sunday, seldom if ever receive His precious Body and Blood unto forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

“Let Us Lift Up Our Hearts”

As I look up at the Pantocrator Christ each Sunday in the liturgy when I say the words, “Let us lift up our hearts,” the

thought comes to me that I am always only a heartbeat away from appearing before Him in person. I think of the Second Coming and Judgment Day when I shall appear before Him to give an account of my life. It is a very sobering experience; an experience that helps me practice the presence of God all week long. I don't get this if I stay home on Sunday. In fact, if I stay away long enough, I forget God altogether. Other things begin to take His place in my life. I become spiritually dead, alive to the world and dead to Christ.

How Great!

The Pantocrator Christ serves to remind us of the majesty and greatness of God. In fact, as one gazes at the Pantocrator in the dome, one cannot fail to be impressed by the great power and magnificence suggested by His neck and shoulders. Some years ago a person visited the observatory atop Mt. Wilson in Southern California. On the wall was a picture of a star. The following words were written beneath the star:

“The light of this star began its journey toward earth 30,000 years ago. It only recently reached this planet and was photographed for the first time at Mt. Wilson.”

Almost breathtaking: travelling at 14 billion miles per day! And it took 30,000 years to arrive! And who made that star? Who else but the Pantocrator!

The same God Who made the stars holds in His hand every breath we draw (Dan. 5:23). *Pantocrator!*

A great preacher said just before he died, “We have preached a great gospel, but remember Jesus Christ is greater than anything we have ever said about Him.” *Pantocrator!*

We Go To Where We Belong

Each Sunday, as God's people, we gather around the One Who loves us. Each Sunday we come to Him to Whom we belong. We gather in the place where we belong: in Church under His Presence. If we do not come to church, we are acknowledging that we do *not* belong to Him. We may belong to money, to golf, to fishing, to hunting, to football, to TV. We may belong to the world, but not to God. We come to church each Sunday to

acknowledge whose we are and where we belong. Just as at the end of each day we go to where we belong—home—so on the Lord's Day we go to where we belong—the Church. We gather to worship and bow the knee and the heart to the Pantocrator. This is why Jesus said that at the Resurrection there will be a separation of the lambs from the goats, i.e., people will gravitate to where they have always belonged, either toward the presence of God or away from the presence of God, either toward heaven or hell.

A father was out in a potato patch late one night to steal potatoes. He looked to the right, to the left, forward and backward and seeing no one, he was about to start filling his sack when his little son who was with him said, "Dad, you forgot to look up."

Erasing The Videotape

How often we, too, forget to look up. We forget that there is Someone Whose presence hovers over us not just when we come to church but constantly. The King—the Pantocrator—is always in the congregation. One day we shall all appear before Him and He will play for us a videotape of all that we have said and done in life. How would we like to see on videotape in God's very presence all of our sins and hear all the terrible words we have spoken. For some of us it will be a moment of extreme embarrassment that will lead to eternal separation from God. But God in His great love for us died on the cross and was resurrected to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He calls on us now to repent of our sins so that those embarrassing episodes may be completely erased from the videotape of our lives, so that we may appear before Him with a clean tape, cleansed and washed by the Blood of the Lamb.

The Meaning of God's Seeing

The Pantocrator Christ in the dome of the Orthodox Church serves to remind us that God's presence constantly hovers over us no matter where we go. We can never escape His presence. He sees us not because He wants to catch us doing something wrong in order to punish us, like the ever-present video cameras in the banks. He watches us because He loves us. As a mother cannot take her eyes off her newborn baby, so the Lord does not withdraw His eyes from those who put their trust in Him (Job 36:7).

Romano Guardini captured so well the meaning of God's seeing, as expressed by the icon of the Pantocrator in the dome, when he wrote,

"God is He Who sees. But His seeing is an act of love. With His seeing He embraces His creatures, affirms them, and encourages them. . . . His seeing is not the kind that merely looks at something: it is creative love, it is the power which enables things to be themselves and rescues them from degeneration and decay. . . . God turns His face to man and thereby gives Himself to man. . . . To be seen by Him does not mean being exposed to a merciless gaze but to be enfolded in the deepest care. . . . We are seen by Him whether we want to be or not. The difference is whether we try to elude His sight, or strive to enter into it. . . . None of the shortcomings and evil in our lives are fatal so long as they confront His gaze. The very act of placing ourselves in His sight is the beginning of renewal. . . . But everything is in danger once we refuse to place ourselves and our lives in His sight."

Thank God, then, that the eyes of the Pantocrator are constantly upon us. He sees us in our sorrow to comfort us. He sees us in our grief to uphold us. He sees us in our sin to forgive us if we repent. He sees us with love and it is His seeing that keeps us at our best. If the eyes of Christ are windows through which God sees us, they are also mirrors in which we see ourselves as cared for and loved by our Creator and Redeemer.

— A Defenseless Church Against An Empire —

The image of Christ Pantocrator was greatly emphasized by the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation and for very good reason. When John was exiled on the Island of Patmos, his exile was due to the fact that the mighty Roman Empire had begun a massive persecution against the early Christian Church in order to crush it. The times were ominous. No one had ever withstood the invincible power of Rome. How could these poor, humble, defenseless Christians survive against such might? John provides the answer in the Book of Revelation. They will survive because of God.

In Control of Everything

God is not weak. He is Pantocrator, which means literally *in control of everything*. Whereas the word *Pantocrator* is used only once in the New Testament, it is used eight times in the Book of Revelation. The persecuted, suffering, bleeding, decimated Church will survive, says John, because God is still on the throne. It was as if he were saying to the beast which is the Roman Empire, "You do not have the last word. You are not in control. God has the last word and He is in control." "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns" (Rev. 19:6). The picture of Christ painted by John in the Book of Revelation is the picture the suffering Church needed at that time. It was the Lord Jesus, risen, ascended, sitting on the throne of glory, able and willing to save His people against impossible odds. With that kind of a Christ, a person could face situations that would drive a person without Christ to utter despair.

As Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis has written:

"Christ reigns. He is on the throne. All through the Bible we notice that when the seers of God were in trouble they saw . . . a throne. Ezekiel in exile saw a throne. Daniel surveying 'the abomination of desolation' saw a throne. John, a refugee on Patmos, saw a throne. In all of the darkness of their times, the martyrs saw a throne. This world is not ours. Nor does it belong to the evil powers of the Devil, although it seems like it does at times. It is God's world; Christ reigns. He has overcome the world.'"⁴⁸

The Old Testament Fulfilled

In the Old Testament the message was that God would be victorious in the battle with evil. He would raise the dead. The new age, eternity, would burst upon us. A new heaven and a new earth would come into being. At the end of days God would send the Messiah and appoint Him King and Judge, Pantocrator.

In the coming of Jesus all of this was fulfilled. The Messiah came. He was raised from the dead "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I Cor. 15:20). In Him salvation has come; sin is forgiven; death is destroyed; new life has begun; the Spirit is at work. "The Lord God the Almighty reigns."

A Two-Level View

John saw visions in the Book of Revelation. Through these visions God was showing him what the real situation was during those terrible persecutions that took the lives of millions of Christians. Rome may be trying to destroy the Christians down below, but God was still on His throne upstairs. Never lose sight of God, John was saying. It was like a two-stage theater. Some things were happening upstairs that clarified what was going on downstairs, even though the people downstairs could not see it. John was trying to get the early Christians to look up to see the Pantocrator Christ. It was not just what the Roman Empire was doing downstairs in its efforts to crush the Church that represented reality. God Omnipotent was still upstairs, still reigning, still in control. Ultimately, the Roman Empire would destroy itself and the Church would survive. This was the greater reality.

We need this kind of double vision as we go through life: to keep one eye on what is going on upstairs and another eye on what is going on downstairs, to see and never to lose sight of the Pantocrator, Omnipotent, sitting on the Heavenly Throne, in control of everything. Thomas a Kempis put it this way:

“The sons of God, standing on things present, do contemplate those things that are eternal. They look on transitory things with the left eye, and with the right (eye) do behold things of heaven.”

Upstairs/Downstairs

To become so absorbed with what’s happening downstairs so that we forget Who is in control of everything upstairs is to lose our soul.

No matter what happens downstairs, God is still on His throne upstairs as King of kings and Lord of lords. We must never lose this “double vision” that we have as Christians. We must never look only at what is happening downstairs without seeing at the same time the beautiful vision of the Pantocrator upstairs. This is what restores our balance and gives us the true perspective on life. The dangers and the threats will always exist. The doctor will continue to say that there is going to have to be a dangerous operation. The politician will continue to talk of the danger of an economic collapse. The prophets of doom will continue to speak of

a coming nuclear holocaust. But as Christians we do not lose hope, because God opens our eyes to see the total reality of things, i.e., that He is still on His Throne. He still rules as Pantocrator and King. His eye is upon me, He keeps me in the center of His love and care as I keep Him in the center of my love and obedience.

The Fourth Chapter of Revelation

The heavens opened for the apostle John at Patmos and he saw the glorious vision of God seated on His throne. It was a vision John needed because he was exiled on Patmos for his faith at a time when the Christian Church was being persecuted mercilessly by the mighty Roman Empire. But God showed John through this vision that it was not the Roman Empire that was almighty but God. I wish you would take the time to read the entire fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation where John describes his vision of the throne of God. Let me quote just briefly from it:

“At once I was in the Spirit, and lo, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. . . . From the throne issued flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire . . . (and there is) a sea of glass, like crystal. . . . And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings . . . never cease to sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’ . . . And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him Who is seated on the throne, Who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, ‘Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou didst create all things, and by Thy will they existed and were created.’”

The Pantocrator in the dome seeks to express this vision of the All-powerful God enthroned in glory as envisioned by the Apostle John at Patmos. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . and He Who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev. 21:1,5).

The Early Christians

The faith expressed by this vision of God on His Throne was the faith of the early Christians. We hear them say in Acts 4:24-26,

“Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, Who by the mouth of our Father David, thy servant, did say to the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against His Anointed.’”

According to the Psalm from which the apostles quoted, this is what happens upstairs when we rebel against God’s authority,

“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision. Then He will speak to them in His wrath, and terrify them in His fury, saying, ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill’” (Psalm 2:4-6).

How much we need today the faith of this vision of God on His throne. No matter how hopeless the situation may seem in our lives, even when we feel we have come to the end of our rope, God is still on His throne. He is still the supreme ruler of His world. Nothing can ever defeat Him. If we cooperate with Him, He will bring about a glorious victory of truth and righteousness in our lives. He will see to it that “all things work together for good to those who cooperate with Him.” Ultimately He will reign. All His enemies “shall be under His feet” and “before Him every knee will bow.”

Obscuring the Vision

Satan tries constantly to obscure this vision of God on His throne through discouragement and despair. When the iconographer was painting the Pantocrator on our dome, he erected scaffolding with a platform under the dome. The ceiling of the church was made low and heavy. The atmosphere was oppressive. But when the platform was removed and we could see the beautiful vision of the Pantocrator on His throne, everything changed. The ceiling of life was lifted. We could see the One Who was in charge of the universe, sitting on the throne.

How easy it is to lose one's poise and balance as one beholds the terrible things going on in our world. The easiest way to falter is by looking only at what's going on downstairs, to forget to look upstairs to see that the world has not gotten out of God's control. He is still on the throne.

Is He Really On the Throne?

I remember descending the steps of a cave in Bethlehem and coming to a place where one could see the countless little bones of the innocent infants whom Herod the king had killed when he learned of the birth of Jesus. In his effort to destroy Jesus, he ordered the slaughter of all the children who were two years and younger. When we read of tragedies like this, we begin to wonder whether God is really on His throne.

Some time ago the TV movie "The Day After" depicted how millions upon millions of persons would suffer and die in the event of a nuclear war. Many of them would be innocent children. As we live with the possibility of such a tragedy, we begin to wonder if God is really on His Throne.

He Will Have the Last Word

This is why we need the Church and the Bible. It is only here that we get the real message. There is a Throne. "The Lord God omnipotent reigns." He is not dead. He is not sick. He is not weak. He has not abdicated. He is alive and well. The kings and the mighty who persecute the innocent and cause their suffering and death will come before God's Throne to give an account of their actions and be judged. God's justice will triumph for eternity. The innocent will be resurrected to enjoy the crowns of their martyrdom. The guilty will also be resurrected to suffer the punishment for their evil deeds. The last chapter of our lives will be written in heaven. Not evil, not injustice, not dictators, not nuclear holocausts, but God Almighty, the Pantocrator, will have the last word. He is on the Throne. "The Lord God omnipotent reigns."

The Great Victory

The icon of the Pantocrator reminds us that the Almighty God Who sits on the Throne has accomplished for us the greatest victory this universe has ever seen: the Resurrection.

Because of our Lord's resurrection, the true Christian is an eternal optimist. The trouble with being an optimist is that people think you're naive; you don't know what's really going on. The real Christian is anything but naive. He knows that there are evil persons in the world who want war. He knows there are such things as cancer and multiple sclerosis. But He remains an optimist because he knows that in Christ he holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake. He does not look only at what is going on downstairs. He looks upstairs at the One Who sits on the Throne; the One Who said, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).

As one Christian said, "If I am in Christ, I am not in a defeated Christ; I am in a Christ Who wrought the greatest victory ever seen on our planet—the victory of life over death—and wrought it not only for Himself, but also for those who believe in Him that they may have the power to walk out of a dead past into a triumphant future."

Every time we come to church and look up at the Pantocrator we think of the great victory He won for us and we claim that victory. It is of this victory that St. Paul sings in Romans 8:35-39:

"We are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. What can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? 'We are being done to death for thy sake all day long,' as Scripture says; 'We have been treated like sheep for slaughter'—and yet, in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through Him Who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Unapproachable?

Sometimes as we look at the Pantocrator Jesus in the dome in all His divine glory and power, we may be tempted to think that

He is far removed from the world, reigning as Lord, but somewhere way up in the sky. The great temptation through the ages has been to doubt not the divine nature of Jesus but His humanity, to adore Him so greatly as to lift Him straight out of real life into some kind of "other worldly" world. In fact, one non-Orthodox Christian said of the Pantocrator Christ that "He is depicted as the stern Judge before whose awful righteousness one may fall and worship but to whom one is unlikely to come in trust, with love and gratitude."

But we must remember that this Pantocrator Jesus in the dome did not stay up there. He "came down from heaven for our salvation and became man" as the Nicene Creed says. He became a real person like you and me. In fact, He was so common that Mary Magdalen mistook Him for a gardener. How could anyone have become more commonplace than that? He was utterly approachable to all people especially the downtrodden. All this means that I may not come to church on Sunday, pay my respects to the Pantocrator Christ in the dome, and then go home and do as I please the rest of the week. That same God in the dome became man and identified Himself with every man. "I was hungry and you fed me."

A "Down-to-Earth" Religion

Thus it is that religion "up in the clouds" is immediately brought down to earth. Religion "up in the dome" is immediately brought down to the ground floor of the church, to the person sitting next to me. How I treat my fellow man is how I treat Christ. And how I treat my fellow human is the basis on which I shall be judged by the Pantocrator when I appear before His awesome tribunal.

Centuries ago the Moslems took over a beautiful Orthodox Church in Asia Minor. They immediately plastered over the facade of the Pantocrator in the dome. But as the years went by and the plaster eroded, the face of Christ began to re-appear through the plaster. Try as people may, to remove Christ from life, to cover Him up, to eliminate Him, He remains Pantocrator. Nothing will ever remove Him from the Throne. "The Lord God omnipotent reigns."

A Universe In Chaos

In spite of this there are those for whom God is not Pantocrator, but a powerless God Who has lost control of the universe. H. G. Wells expresses this when he portrays the world as a great stage produced and managed by God. The curtain goes up and all is peaches and cream. The world is ethereally beautiful and the characters are a delight to behold. All is well until the leading man steps on the hem of the dress of the leading lady, who falls over a chair and knocks over a lamp, which overturns a table and brings down the whole back scenery. This brings the whole scenery down in chaos on the heads of the actors. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, God the producer, is frantically running about, pulling strings and shouting orders, trying desperately to restore order, but unable to do so. Orthodox Christianity has never believed in such a powerless and limited God.

God is Pantocrator, limitless, infinite, all-ruling, all-loving, all-caring, holding the reigns of the universe firmly in His hands.

He Is Able

The image of God as Pantocrator conveys the message that God is ABLE, exceedingly able to help in time of need. We express this in the prayer, "Holy God, HOLY MIGHTY, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us." The Pantocrator, He Who sits on the Throne, is mightily able to help. When the early Christians preached Christ, they preached Him as One Who was alive and strong, able in the power of His resurrection to flood the dark places of the world with light, able to shake the Roman Empire and change the face of history, able to make the weak strong, and the crooked straight.

The word of God tells us that Christ the Pantocrator is:

- “. . . ABLE to do far more than you would ever dare to ask or even dream of” (Eph. 3:20).
- “. . . ABLE to give you everything you need and more” (2 Cor. 9:8).
- “. . . ABLE to save completely all who come to God through Him” (Hebr. 7:25).
- “. . . ABLE to help you when you suffer and are tempted” (Hebr. 2:18).

“ . . . ABLE to keep you from falling away and to bring you sinless and perfect into His glorious presence with shouts of everlasting joy” (Jude 1:24).

“ . . . ABLE to deliver you” (Dan. 3:17).

“ . . . ABLE to safely guard all that you have given Him until the day of His return” (2 Tim. 1:12).

“ . . . ABLE to do anything He promised” (Rom. 4:31).

Is Anything Too Hard For Him?

Someone said once, “When I worry I go to the mirror and say to myself, ‘This tremendous thing which is worrying me is beyond a solution. It is especially too hard for my Lord Jesus Christ to handle.’ After I have said that, I smile and I am ashamed.”

Is anything too hard for the Pantocrator, the One Who rules the universe?

In the words of V. J. Berg,

When we look to man for help,

We get the help of a man.

When we trust society,

We get its tangled plan.

When we depend upon ourselves,

Our impotence shows through.

But when in faith we turn to prayer,

We get what God can do.

Where Is God?

Often a situation arises that causes us grave concern. We become filled with anxiety. We let our imagination paint dark pictures of what might happen. An aching doubt begins to possess us and we begin to wonder whether God is on the Throne. We feel like crying out, “Where is God?”

The cure for such anxious and troubled states of mind is faith, faith that affirms in the midst of danger: “Fear not. God is in charge. He is with me as light and wisdom. He is with me as healing power. He is with me as my source of supply. He is with me as love and forgiveness. He is in charge—still on the Throne. I find peace and strength in this assurance.”

For we believe in a God Who chose not to remain on His Throne, but took on our form and became one with us. He knows our needs, our pain, our fears, because He came to live with us. He reigns on the Throne but with a compassion for us that is beyond expression.

— *The Connection That Makes The Difference* —

Someone said to a reformed alcoholic, “I see you have overcome the mastery of the devil at last.” “No,” came the quiet answer, “but I do have the Master of the devil—the Pantocrator Christ within me.”

In order to receive power from the All-Powerful Pantocrator, we must get attached and stay attached to Him through faith, prayer and the sacraments. As the branch that remains attached to the vine receives nourishment and life, so the one who maintains a living connection with Jesus through prayer, receives power to live, power to overcome. Like the railway tickets we used to see that said, “Not good if detached,” we are not good, we are weak, powerless, ineffective, if we are detached from the Pantocrator.

We have to be connected. We were created to be connected. For Jesus, the place where everything connected was prayer. It was where God and man came together in a glorious union. “I and the Father are one,” He said. Connected! “You will be one with us too,” He said to the disciples, “if you pray; if you abide in us.” Prayer is where everything gets connected. Being connected with the Pantocrator Christ puts me in touch with infinite power and opens the way to unbounded possibilities.

For, Jesus is not just a great Example; He is also the Great Enabler, the All-Powerful Pantocrator with Whom I can connect.

— *Ever-Present* —

The icon of the Pantocrator in the dome should remind us that God’s Presence hovers just above us not only when we are in church but wherever we may be. He is there as we sleep at night. He is there when we work during the day. He is there when we relax. He is there when we are being tempted. He is there when we are bedridden with illness. He will be there when the final moment of life comes. In fact, our faith should help us visualize the Pantocrator Christ hovering above us constantly as we go through

life. Finally, one day those everlasting arms will reach down to lift us and carry us into the fullness of His presence, into the bright side of His love.

“All Is Well, I Have Seen His Face”

A person was greatly worried about a terrible storm at sea. It was his first ocean trip and he had never seen such huge waves. But as lightning flashed he caught sight of the captain on the bridge and there was a smile on his face. That was all he needed. He now felt secure. And he began to encourage the other fearful passengers huddled below deck by telling them, “I have seen the face of the captain and he smiled. All is well.”

That is what looking at the serene face of the Pantocrator should do to us: restore calm, buttress us from within, and give us strength for the journey of life. “If God is for us, who is against us? He Who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?” (Rom. 8:31-32)

A Captain at the Controls

I have been in the cockpit of a jumbo jet. There are so many controls that one wonders how anyone can know what they are all for. But the captain knows and using them, he lifts that huge aircraft off the ground with the greatest ease. Is it only a jumbo jet that needs a captain? Is there no Captain guiding the cosmos? Is there no Pantocrator at the controls? One Who knows exactly when and how to push all the proper switches and buttons to control the universe He created? People who don't believe this, lose life's meaning and joy. Imagine how desolate it must feel to believe that you are on a planet hurtling through space with no one at the controls!

Fall Down Before Him

There is a very touching story told of Queen Victoria. Handel's “Messiah” was first played in England in the Queen's honor. It was the custom for people to rise to their feet at the “Hallelujah Chorus,” but everyone felt the Queen should remain seated by reason of her station. Yet when the great strains of majestic music floated out, “And He shall reign for ever and ever. He shall reign for ever and ever,” the Queen rose to her feet. She

lifted the crown from her head and stood with bowed head with the rest of the people.

“And He shall reign forever and ever.” The Lord God omnipotent—the Pantocrator—reigns! But the question is, “Does He reign as King and Pantocrator on the throne of your heart and mine?” If He does, then like the twenty-four elders in Chapter 4 of the Book of Revelation, let us “fall down before Him Who is seated on the throne and worship Him Who lives for ever and ever.” Like them, let us take off the crowns of our pride and cast them before His Throne as we sing,

*“Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for Thou didst create all things,
and by Thy will they existed and were created.”
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.*