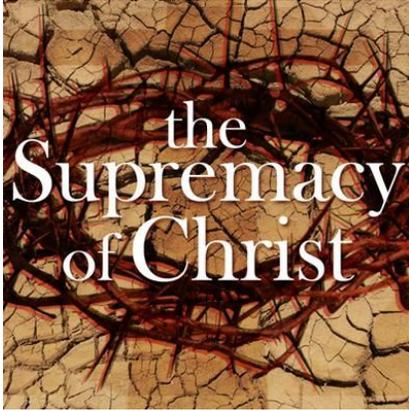


# Session #2: 1:15-2:10

Compiled and written by Theresa Lisiecki

## The Supremacy of Christ 1:15-23

What we encounter in these first verses of this section (1:15-20) scholars believe is most probably an



early Christian hymn which would have been known to the community at Colossae. This hymn presents Christ as the mediator of all creation as well as of redemption. It proclaims:

- Christ as God and creator of all creation. (1:15-17)
- As redeemer who renews all things through His grace.

(1:18-20)

St. Paul is reminding the community, through a hymn they sing, that Jesus Christ is before all and above all. This becomes a foundational “statement” as St. Paul seeks to “dethrone” the practice of angel worship.

**1:15 He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God:** In Genesis we read that: *Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness* (Genesis 1:26). In many ways our spirit, our soul make visible the invisible God. If this is true (and it is), then Jesus in his humanity provides the fullness of that image. Humanity was created in God’s image but Jesus is the image. Think of humanity as a mirror reflecting the likeness of God and Jesus as the image itself. Jesus is the image because he comes from the same substance as God the Father – *consubstantial*. In this hymn it goes on to call Christ the **first-born of all creation**. This statement is not made to argue with the idea and our belief as Catholics that just as the Father and the Spirit always were (no beginning) so was the Son. The hymn is making reference to the millenniums old practice of the first born son inheriting all of the father’s wealth. Christ as the first born and only natural son (we are children by adoption), He becomes the inheritor of all of the Father’s possessions. In this case of all of creation. It also has the dual meaning of evoking images of the resurrection. Jesus, in His humanity, rising from the dead was the first “born” into eternal life.

**1:16 in him all things were created:** This first part of this verse is part of the scriptural foundation for the theological belief of the Trinity and that the Trinity was before all things were created. St. Paul then goes on to identify the power of this creation – **whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities**. In brief what St. Paul is talking about are angels. There are nine distinct choirs of angels. (For more information on angels see today’s second handout.) St. Paul makes no distinction between blessed holy angels and demonic power so as to show that Christ has dominion over all creation.

**1:18 He is the head of the body:** One of the great themes of St. Paul is the analogy of the Church as the Body of Christ. The membership make up the various aspects of a working body but it is Christ who is the head of the Church, the head of the body over seeing the activities of the members. St. Paul stresses that the body and head share the same life and that each member of the Church/body works for the good of the whole. (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

**first-born of the dead:** meaning that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead. When Adam and Eve were cast from the garden of Eden the gates of heaven were closed. All who died, both the righteous and the unrighteous, when they died went into hell. For the righteous it was a waiting area. When Jesus died and rose from the dead the gates of heaven were opened and all those who had died in right relationship with God were raised into heaven.

**1:19 the fullness of God:** Jesus, while fully human was also fully God. Within him dwelt the fullness of God's divinity – the grace, the power, the holiness. As we as Catholic profess – Jesus was fully divine and fully human.

**1:20 reconcile to himself all things:** From the beginning of time it was God's intention that all of humanity be in union with Him throughout time. Placing Adam and Eve and all their future descendants in heaven, God's plan was that we would be united. But in their disobedience Adam and Eve sinned showing God that humanity was not ready for eternal life. So God cast them out and a wall rose between God and humanity. Jesus came to break down that wall. Through the **blood of the cross**, peace was restored between heaven and earth. Through Jesus' death and resurrection all things were reconciled with God.

**1:21-23 in order to present you:** In these last verses St. Paul directs the teaching to those gathered in Colossae. Verses 15-20, St. Paul has presented a teaching on the supremacy of Christ by offering a teaching on salvation history. Now he draws that teaching into their lives by explaining that once they were far from God, **estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds**. But through the death and resurrection of Christ who **reconciled...by his death**; and their acceptance of Him as their Lord and savior, they have been **presented holy and blameless and irreproachable**. Their challenge (and ours) is that they **continue in faith...not shifting from the hope in the gospel**. This is St. Paul's concern. He has heard that some are modifying their beliefs so as to incorporate false teachings and beliefs.

### **St. Paul in his Apostolic Ministry 1:24-29**

**1:24 rejoice in my sufferings:** Did St. Paul suffer? *with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.* While 2 Corinthians (11:23b-27) does not list everything, it gives us a good idea of what St. Paul endured for the faith. But in the midst of it all he endured with great joy. He rejoices in his sufferings because his sufferings (our sufferings) **complete what is lacking in Christ's sufferings**. It is difficult to contemplate that the suffering of Christ was not enough, that in some way the suffering of Christ was inadequate. It truth the suffering of Christ was perfect and complete, and it is heresy to say otherwise. What St. Paul is speaking about has not to do with Christ but with us. What is lacking is our willingness to be sharers in the suffering of Christ. The term *lacking* doesn't refer to God being deficient in any way, nor to

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some inadequacy on Christ's part but to our lack. Think in terms of being given a bicycle. The bicycle is complete lacking in nothing. But as a gift until we put it to use, until we get on and ride it remains an object of admiration. What is "lacking" in Christ's suffering is what is lacking in us – our acceptance, our participation in.

**1:26 *the mystery hidden*:** St. Paul is speaking here of the plan of salvation. The plan of salvation from Original sin to the death and resurrection of Christ was hidden until Jesus, explained to us by St. Paul and continues through you and me only seeing completion with the end of all time. All that we read, all that we study in the Old Testament begins with explaining why there was the need for a Messiah (the sin of Adam and Eve), tells how the world was prepared for God being made incarnate in Jesus Christ. The story of salvation is the story of how humanity was and continues to be liberated from sin and the ongoing establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth express in the Church.

**1:28 *present every man mature in Christ*:** We could substitute the word "grown-up" "fully-grown" or some idea like that. In truth the best word to use here is "perfect". As we live our faith in our daily lives, our challenge is to better and better as being Christian so that one day, as we stand before the power of God, we are presented perfect in the ways of Christ.

### **St. Paul Absent but Present 2:1-5**

**2:1 *how great a struggle*:** The Greek word for struggle literally translates into "wrestling match." As we have talked about, St. Paul loves his sports images. While Epaphras acted as St. Paul's messenger, St. Paul still remained their leader much in the same way the Bishop or the Pope are the ultimate leader of the Church here in Livonia.

***for those in Laodicea*:** This is a city approximately 15 kilometers from Colossae. At the time of St. Paul's writing Laodicea was a much larger community than Colossae. Because of the closeness of these who communities, as well as the city of Hierapolis, it makes sense that communication from St. Paul would be shared with the Christian communities in the other cities.

**2:2 *that their hearts may be encouraged*:** If one wants to know the intention, the general reason for St. Paul writing, this phrase explains it. He writes to encourage, to comfort, to buoy up those who might be challenged and/or discouraged so that they can face the future with courage and confidence.

***the mystery of God, Christ*:** The use of the word mystery here recalls the previous conversation in chapter one which focuses on God's plan of salvation. Then we come to the phrase "God, Christ" which is confusing. Is St. Paul calling Christ, God? It is not impossible that this was St. Paul's intention. *...the ancient manuscript copiers produced fifteen variations on this phrase in their attempts to explain it: (God the Father, God, the Father of Christ...)* New Collegeville Bible Commentary. It is most likely that the meaning behind this short phrase is that Christ is the focus and content of God's mystery of salvation.

**2:3 *the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*:** St. Paul is struggling with the reality that the Christians of this area are looking elsewhere for their confidence, support and wisdom (pagan religions and Judaizers). So, he is challenging them to realize that the fullness of wisdom, the fullness

of grace, the fullness of faith is found in what they already have – Jesus. In these opening statements St. Paul is setting the stage for his teaching yet to come.

**2:4: no one may deceive you:** At this point St. Paul restates the note of admonition so as to prepare for the warning that will be the focus and content for the remaining of the letter.

In this next section (2:6-23) St. Paul will address the issues created by the Jewish troublemakers. By his comments scholars believe there were two main issues:

- The deity, or God-nature of Christ was being denied
- The adding of rituals and rules from the Mosaic laws as requirements of living a full Christian life.

St. Paul will reassert the complete divinity of Jesus as the Christ (2:9) and will stress the issue that Gentile believers are complete in their faith and have no need to revisit or incorporate the expectations of the Old Testament covenant that was a part of the Jewish ritual and law. Also, St. Paul has reminded the Colossians of their fullness of life through faith in Christ (1:15-2:5), he is ready to challenge them to stand firm in Christ and reject the false “philosophy” that is threatening their faith. In the remainder of chapter two St. Paul uses four vivid images to convey what happens when a person is baptized into Christ:

1. A spiritual circumcision (of the heart),
2. A burial and rising with Christ,
3. The cancelation of a debt – an IOU that is erased and even nailed to the cross, and
4. A victory over spiritual enemies.

There is a fifth that is subtler. Using the word “stripping” in verses 11 and 15, St. Paul is most likely alluding to the Christian baptismal rite of taking off an old garment and donning a new, white one after the immersion in the waters of baptism. This symbol will be somewhat the focus in 3:8-10.

### **Sharers in the Fullness of God 2:6-10**

**2:6-7 you received Christ Jesus:** St. Paul is writing to believers who have received Jesus as their Lord and savior. This might be a message we would want to take root in the lives of our pre-teen Confirmation student who have been baptized. While it was a gift that was given to them as babies, they belong to God and God’s way. Therefore our challenge to them is to **live in him (Christ)**. Through their baptism they were **rooted** in the faith. As they grew in life they were also **built up in him (Christ)** through instruction and the other sacraments with the hope that it would **establish** (them) **in the faith**. But, St. Paul will go on to challenge this, for whatever reason they have departed from the faith being enchanted by easier roads.

**2:8 by philosophy and human deceit:** Our understanding of the word philosophy today we think of a way of thinking, of viewing or understanding the world around us. In the time of St. Paul the word “philosophy” was also used to refer to the Jewish way of life. (Even today there are individuals whose faith is more of a philosophy, an approach to life than it is a belief system.) Scholars believe this is what St. Paul is speaking about – the Jewish way of life which denounces Jesus as the Son of

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God. St. Paul goes on further to challenge the *human traditions* embraced and celebrated by these Judaizers. The rituals we offer in prayer and praise are human expressions of inner truths and beliefs. The sign of the cross we make as we begin our prayers was not something God given. It was an expression, a prayer that within each of us in the sign, mark of the crucifixion. If done mindlessly and without intention the sign of the cross as well as so many other outward traditions of faith are nothing more than an empty gesture. St. Paul is challenging the Colossians to recognize that what false teachings they are being drawn into come from human minds, not from God. This was one of Jesus' great teachings to the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Priests of the Temple. Salvation does not come from what we do, it is a gift given in love and mercy from God.

**2:9 in him the whole-fullness of deity dwells bodily:** The "him" here is Jesus Christ. This verse, this section is one of the foundational scriptures to our belief that Jesus Christ was fully God. *The mystery of the God-made-man was a stumbling block for many in Israel, who were skeptical that Yahweh's (God) presence could reside in a man and who were scandalized that the Messiah should suffer the curse of crucifixion.* Ignatius Catholic Study Bible. Even today there are those who find it difficult to believe that a god would become incarnate, become man. And even if that were true, why would they suffer such a painful and humiliating death. St. Paul is stating here a mystery not to be solved but simply to be believed. God did become man and suffered & died so that we might know the gift of the depth of His love and the gift of salvation

**2:10 head of all rule and authority:** St. Paul reminds us that while we do have earthy authority over us – in the church there are bishops and the Pope; in the world there are many...police, presidents and kings; the ultimate authority in our lives as true believers must be God through Jesus Christ. Martyrs have gone to their death following their faith rather than the rule or authority of any earthly king.

### Reflection Questions:

1. We studied in verse 1:24 that our sufferings *complete what is lacking in Christ's sufferings*. What does that mean to you. Can you see or agree that your suffering matters to the plan of salvation?
2. God gave each of us a mind to use. The more we understand the better we can live our faith. How well do you know your faith? What could you be doing to learn and better understanding the teachings of our faith?

### Catechism of the Catholic Church

Christ and Angels: 331-333

Christ as Head of the Body: 792-795

Christ as Mystery: 514-515

Father revealed in the Son: 238-242

Participation in the Suffering of Christ: 618-623

**Resurrection: 651-658**

**The Church: 772-773**

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