

Q: At Sunday Mass during the Nicene Creed, why do we say that “on the third day, he rose *again*”. Did Jesus rise more than once?

A: Consider the wording of the Nicene Fathers and that constitutes for Catholics an article of faith:

Original Greek text: “...ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ...”

Latin translation: “...*resurrexit tertia die*...”

English translation: “*rose again on the third day*...”

Both the Greek (ἀναστάντα) and the Latin (*resurrexit*) employ the word, “*resurrected*” that has been translated into English as “*rose again*”. The literal interpretation “re-surrect” means to physically “again-arise” (again: “*re*”, arise: “*surrect*”), which implies to “stand erect again”. When interpreted within the context of Sacred Scripture and of the Council Fathers, this expression signifies more than a physical action. Rising again is a two-fold reality, both physical and spiritual. While the *physical* reality constitutes the body’s action of rising, the *spiritual* reality constitutes the soul’s action of returning to the body, and reanimating and restoring to it the rationality and volition it once enjoyed. Thus the word “*again*” signifies the “*re*”-storation of the soul (intellect, memory and will) to its body, which in turn, causes the body to physically rise – not vice-versa. By this means, there is restored to the physical body of Jesus the psychosomatic union he once enjoyed on earth.

From a purely *physical* angle, in modern-day English one may consider a man walking down the street, who trips on a rock and “gets up again”, that is, he “stands erect again”. This should not imply that he fell once before, but that he was restored to his previous condition of standing erect. Or again, when someone is dead and rises, he who was once in a vertical position is laid out in a coffin and is in a horizontal position, only to return to a vertical position. Similarly, Jesus who was in a vertical position in life, died and was layed out in a horizontal position. He was the restored to a vertical position again. Within this context, it is clear that *again* does not mean “twice”, but to be restored “to one’s previous condition”.

To interpret the literal meaning of a word apart from its context is to distort the intended meaning of the text. I conclude with the words of the Psalmist who affirms, “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will *restore my life again*; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up” (Ps. 71:20).

To better grasp the proper meaning of the text of the books in Sacred Scripture, of mystical literature and of conciliar documents, I refer you to the Newsletter on this website entitled, “How God Speaks to His Prophets”.

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