

SERVING TWO MASTERS
And the Lamp of the Body
JUSTIFICATION AND FAITH

July 3, 2011
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

GOSPEL: Matthew 6:22-33

EPISTLE: Romans 5:1-10

The Gospel and Epistle lessons of two weeks ago covered the Communion of Saints and the Will of God. Last Sunday we began a series of practical teachings for the church: Doers of the Law and this series continues for the next several weeks. Today’s Gospel and Epistle lessons address another aspect of the basics of the Christian faith: Trust, Faith and the Lamp of the Body. The Church Fathers have had a great deal to say about this subject. The Gospel Lesson is taken from part of what is known as Christ’s “sermon on the mount”, and is a continuation of the Gospel lesson for Forgiveness Sunday, or the Sunday Before Lent.

Today’s Gospel lesson about trust is used in Western churches in the United States for the American holiday of Thanksgiving in November. Sometimes it is also used for the 15th Sunday after Trinity. Today’s Epistle lesson on Justification by Faith is used in the West for the 3rd Sunday in Lent.

Table of Contents

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 6:19-34, Luke 11:33-36, Luke 12:16-34:.....	88
The Eye of the Soul.....	88
The Service of Two Masters	91
What is Mammon?.....	92
How Does Mammon Affect Us?	93
Serving Mammon Is Idolatry.....	99
Where Can Those Serve Whose Only Gifts Are with Mammon?.....	101
Worrying About Tomorrow	102
Consider the Irrational Creatures and the Lilies	104
The Gentiles Seek Luxury; Consider the Twelve Apostles.....	109
Seek the Kingdom First; All This Will Be Added	111
Use of the Things of This World	111
How Are Things Added to Us in This World?.....	113
Concentrating on Worldly Things Causes Us to Lose Focus	115
Loving Oneself Rather Than God.....	120
The Subtle Impact of Mammon on Our Lives	121
The Indian Gold-Digging “Ants”.....	124

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 6:19-34, Luke 11:33-36, Luke 12:16-34:

The illustrations used in today's Gospel lesson are eyes, masters and trust and our lives are compared to birds and flowers. From the viewpoint of Christian life basics, this answers our questions regarding whom do we look to for illumination, who is our master and in whom do we place our trust. But there are many subtleties involved that can deceive us, and the Church Fathers have had a great deal to say about these matters.

The Eye of the Soul

The Gospel lesson begins by pointing out that the eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22). From a Christian basics viewpoint, we need to ask ourselves what kind of illumination we are getting. Two kinds of "eyes" are contrasted here, where the "eye" referred to is not necessarily just a physical eye. The first type of eye is described using the Greek word *haplous* and is usually translated "good." The literal meaning of "*haplous*" is "not twisted, not braided but single stranded." This connotation is carried over into verse 24 when Jesus spoke of two masters. If one's eye is directed single-mindedly on the things of God, one's whole body will be full of light. In the parallel account from Luke, the result is that the lamp is set on a lamp stand (not under a basket) that those who come in may see the light (Luke 11:33-34).

The second type of eye is described using the Greek word *poneros* and is usually translated "bad." A more precise definition of "*poneros*" implies bad in the sense of having a hurtful effect. And the hurtful effect is the darkness that fills the body. Note that the Lord said, "If the light that is in you is darkness" (Matthew 6:23). How can light be darkness? This darkness is not just an absence of light, but a tangible darkness as in the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:12, Colossians 1:13, John 3:19). And whether or not the body is filled with the "light" of darkness depends on what we let in through our eyes. Do we look at things that are true, worshipful, righteous, holy, lovely, of good report, virtuous or praise worthy? (Philippians 4:8). Or do we look at the opposite? Or do we try a little of each and hope for the best?

James, the Lord's brother, addresses a single mindedness in his Epistle. Addressing quarrels in the churches, he speaks of the darkness (i.e., desire for pleasure, lust, murder, covetousness, adultery) as friendship with the world and equates it to enmity with God (James 4:1-10). James uses the term double minded (literally two-souled) to refer to this conflict between the two masters. Each of the things he refers to (desire for pleasure, lust, etc.) is something that comes into the body via the gateway of the eyes.

John Chrysostom made¹ an analogy between the eye as the lamp of the body and the mind as the lamp of the soul:

"The Lord had spoken of the mind as enslaved and brought into captivity by the lust of the eyes for example (Matthew 5:27-30), and there were not many who could easily discern this. He transfers the lesson, therefore, to things outward and laying before men's eyes, that by these, the others also might reach their understanding. Thus, if you do not know, He says, what a thing it is to be injured in mind, learn it from the things of the body. For just what the eye is to the body, the same is the mind to the soul. Just as when the eyes are blinded,

¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XX, 3-4.

most of the energy of the other members is gone – their light being quenched – so also when the mind is depraved, your life will be filled with countless evils. For God, He says, gave us understanding, so we might chase away all ignorance, and have the right judgment of things; and that using this as a kind of weapon and light against all that is grievous or hurtful, we might remain in safety. But we betray the gift for the sake of things that are superfluous and useless.”

“‘For with what intent do you desire riches?’ says He. ‘Is it not that you may enjoy pleasure and luxury? Why now, this above all things you will fail to obtain by doing this; it will rather² be just the contrary.’ For if, when our eyes are cut out, we are not able to perceive any pleasant thing because of our injury, much more will this be our case in the perversion and maiming of the mind”.

John Cassian took this a step further and described³ the words of Antony the Great on how a monk might achieve perfection from the deceits and snares of the devil. Antony was addressing communities of believers who had dedicated their lives to a strict adherence to the things of God. Some monks thought one could achieve this by zeal in fasting, vigils, and despising worldly things; others thought withdrawal from the world in solitude or in charity and kindness was the answer. Antony stated, however, that while these things are good, if they lacked discernment or discretion, they could spend their whole life doing this and still be deceived by the devil. This discernment or discretion is what Christ referred to as the eye or the light of the body. Antony gave two examples of this in King Saul and King Ahab.

“All these things which you have mentioned are indeed needful, and helpful to those who are thirsting for God, and desirous to approach Him. But the experience of many people will not allow us to make these the most important of gifts. For often when men are most strict in fasting or in vigils, nobly withdraw into solitude, and when they fulfill all the duties of kindness, yet still we have seen them suddenly deceived. They could not bring the work they had entered into to a suitable close, but brought their exalted fervor and praiseworthy manner of life to a terrible end. We shall be able clearly to recognize what it is, which mainly leads to God, if we trace out with greater care the reason for their downfall and deception. When the works of the above-mentioned virtues were abounding in them, discretion alone was lacking, and this did not allow them to continue to the end. No other reason for their falling off can be discovered. They were not sufficiently instructed by their elders to obtain judgment and discretion. Discretion teaches a monk always to walk along the royal road, and does not allow him to be puffed up on the right hand of virtue, i.e., from excess zeal to transgress the bounds of moderation. Nor does it allow him to be enamored by slackness and turn aside to the vices on the left hand, i.e., pretending to control the body and growing slack with a lukewarm spirit. This discretion is termed in the gospel the ‘eye’, and ‘light of the body’. ‘The light of your body is your eye: but if your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness’ (Matthew 6:22-23). Because it discerns all the thoughts and actions of men, it sees all things, which should be done. But if in any man this ‘light’ is ‘evil’, i.e., not fortified by sound judgment and knowledge, or deceived by some error and presumption, it will make our

² That is, if one concentrates on pleasure and luxury, one can expect to end up in hell.

³ John Cassian, 2nd Conference of Abbot Moses, I, ii, 2-3.

whole body 'full of darkness'. That is, it will darken all our vision and our actions, as they will be involved in the darkness of vices and the gloom of disturbances. For He says, 'if the light which is in you is darkness, how great will that darkness be!' () For no one can doubt that when the judgment of our heart goes wrong, and is overwhelmed by the night of ignorance, our thoughts and deeds, which are the result of deliberation and discretion, must be involved in the darkness of still greater sins".

"King Saul was, in the judgment of God, the first to be worthy of the kingdom of His people Israel; but because he was lacking in this 'eye' of discretion, his whole body was full of darkness, and he was cast down from the kingdom, being deceived by the darkness of this 'light'. In error, he imagined that his own offerings were more acceptable to God than obedience to the command of Samuel (1 Samuel 15:1-23). He fell in the same matter in which he had hoped to propitiate the Divine Majesty. Ignorance of this discretion led Ahab, the king of Israel, after a triumph and splendid victory, which had been granted to him by the favor of God, to fancy that mercy on his part was better than the execution of the divine command (1 Kings 20:13-43), which he thought was a cruel rule. Moved by this consideration, he desired to temper a bloody victory with mercy; on account of his indiscriminating clemency, he was rendered full of darkness in his whole body, and condemned to death".

John Chrysostom put it⁴ in similar terms using the example of the life of the Apostle Paul. Being prudent and discreet in humility is the light that enabled most of Paul's success.

"It was not by Paul's miracles that men were made believers. For a man must also be irreproachable in conduct, prudent and discreet in his dealings with others, fearless of danger, and apt to teach. It was by these qualities of his life that the greater part of Paul's success was achieved. Where there were these, there was no need of miracles. We see he was successful in many such cases, prior to the use of miracles. But, today, we have none of these qualities, and we pretend to command all things. Yet if one of them were separated from the other, it becomes useless. For example, what is the advantage of a man's being ever so fearless of danger, if his life is open to censure. 'For if the light that is in you is darkness', said Christ, 'how great is that darkness?' (Matthew 6:23) Again, what is the advantage of a man having an irreproachable life, if he is sluggish and indolent? 'For, he that does not take his cross, and follow after Me is not worthy of Me' (Matthew 10:38). Also, 'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11). Again, what is the advantage of being both these, unless a man is at the same time prudent and discreet in 'knowing how he ought to answer each one?' (Colossians 4:6) Even if miracles are not in our power, yet both these qualities are in our power. Still however, Paul contributed so much from himself, yet he attributed all to grace. This is the act of a grateful servant. And we would not even have heard of his good deeds, had he not been brought to a necessity of declaring them".

To illustrate the state of the covetous John Chrysostom made⁵ an analogy to the custom of his day, which used convicted criminals as workers in the mines. The problem is that if the

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 7.

eye of the soul of the covetous has been put out, and all they have is darkness, it is like they are living in a mine. Their state becomes worse than that of criminals working the mines, since the criminals at least get a break after their shift is over.

“It is said that that soil which is impregnated with gold has certain clefts and recesses in those gloomy caverns. The malefactor condemned to labor in that place, takes a lamp and a pick, and enters the mine, and carries with him a flask to drop oil into the lamp, because there is darkness even by day below ground, without a ray of light. When the time of day calls him to his wretched meal, he is ignorant of the time, but his jailor from above strikes violently on the cave, by that clattering sound declares to those who are at work below that it is the end of the day”.

“But there are things more grievous than these in the case of the covetous. In the first place, the covetous have a more stringent jailor, that is, avarice, and so much more stringent in that besides their body he also chains their soul. And this darkness also is more terrible than that below ground. For it is not subject to sense, but they produce it within, wherever they go, carrying it about with them. For the eye of their soul is put out, which is the reason why more than anything else Christ calls them wretched, saying, ‘But if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness’ (Matthew 6:23). The condemned miners have at least a lamp shining, but the covetous are deprived even of this beam of light; and therefore every day they fall into pitfalls. The condemned, when night overtakes them, take a break, that is, the night. But to the covetous, even this time off is blocked by their own avarice; such grievous thoughts they have even at night, since without disturbance from anyone, at full leisure they cut themselves to pieces seeking more wealth”.

“Such are their circumstances in this world. But in the next, there are the intolerable furnaces, the rivers burning with fire, the gnashing of teeth, the chains never to be loosed, the envenomed worm, the gloom with no light, the never-ending miseries. Let us fear them, beloved, the fountain of so great punishments, the insatiate madness, the destroyer of our salvation. For it is impossible at the same time to love both money and your soul. Let us be convinced that wealth is dust and ashes, which it leaves us when we depart, or rather that even before our departure it often darts away from us, and injures us both in regard to the future and in respect to the present life. For before hell fire, and before that punishment, even here it surrounds us with innumerable wars, and stirs up fighting and bickering. For nothing is so apt to cause war as avarice: nothing is so apt to produce beggary, whether it show itself in wealth or in poverty. For in the souls of poor men also this grievous disease arises, and aggravates their poverty even more. For riches and poverty are determined not by the measure of the substance, but by the disposition of the mind; and he rather is the poorest of all, who is always hungering after more and is never able to satisfy this wicked lust”.

The Service of Two Masters

The Lord made the statement that one cannot serve two masters, where the implication is that the two masters are pulling in opposite directions (i.e. Light vs. Darkness). The eye that is

⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XXIII, 8.

“*haplous*” or single minded here becomes important in order that one’s entire body be full of light. Luke’s account (Luke 11:36) adds a phrase suggesting that no part of the body be dark⁶. Note also that by filling the eye with things that are *poneros*⁷ means that we are serving a master who is the Prince of Darkness. In connection with this, He said that one cannot serve God and mammon.

What is Mammon?

Generally “mammon” refers to the things of this world. But Clement of Alexandria extended⁸ this definition to say that “mammon” refers to all the resources of money directed to various pleasures.

“He who makes it his purpose to please men cannot please God, since the multitude chooses not what is profitable, but what is pleasant. But in pleasing God, as a consequence one gets the favor of the good among men. He views with suspicion even a word that produces pleasure, a pleasant movement and act of the mind. ‘For no one can serve two masters, God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). This refers not simply to money, but the resources arising from money bestowed on various pleasures. In reality, it is not possible for him who magnanimously and truly knows God, to serve antagonistic pleasures”.

This does not mean that one can never have any pleasure; it is just that our delight should be in the things of God, rather than centered on physical pleasure.

Irenaeus stated⁹ that the term “mammon” comes from the Hebrew (Aramaic) and implies covetousness and an insatiable gullet. Mammon is a thing that really exists, but it is not God, although those who serve mammon like slaves may treat mammon as a god.

“The Lord Himself directed us to ‘render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21); naming indeed Caesar as Caesar, but confessing God as God. In like manner also, He says, ‘You cannot serve two masters’. He Himself interprets, saying, ‘You cannot serve God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24), acknowledging God indeed as God, but mentioning mammon as a thing also having an existence. He does not call mammon Lord when He says, ‘You cannot serve two masters’; but He teaches His disciples who serve God, not to be subject to mammon, nor to be ruled by it. For He says, ‘He that commits sin is the slave of sin’ (John 8:34). He terms those ‘the slaves of sin’ who serve sin, but does not certainly call sin itself God; thus also He terms those who serve mammon ‘the slaves of mammon’, not calling mammon God. For mammon is, according to the Jewish language, which the Samaritans also use, a *covetous* man, and one who wishes to have more than he ought to have. According to the Hebrew, by the addition of a syllable, it signifies one whose gullet is insatiable. Therefore, according to both these things, we cannot serve God and mammon.”

Clement of Alexandria also stated¹⁰ that the issue in choosing between God and mammon involves neither fear of punishment nor the promise of earthly gifts, since both produce mere

⁶ Greek “*skotenon*” as related to the darkness “*skotos*.”

⁷ That is, bad in the sense of “hurtful”.

⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VII, 12.

⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, viii, 1.

hirelings. We should desire to seek the good and live according to the likeness of Christ and not according to the love of money, which He calls “mammon”.

“We must have recourse to the word of salvation neither from fear of punishment nor from promise of a gift, but on account of the good itself. Those who do so stand on the right hand of the sanctuary (Matthew 25:32-40, Hebrews 8:1, 1:3); but those who think that by the gift of what is perishable they shall receive in exchange what belongs to immortality are, in the parable of the two brothers, called ‘hirelings’ (Matthew 21:28-31). This sheds some light on the expression ‘in the likeness and image’ (2 Corinthians 3:18), in the fact that some live according to the likeness of Christ, while those who stand on the left hand live according to their own image. To choose by way of imitation differs from the choice of him who chooses according to knowledge, as that which is set on fire differs from that which is illuminated”.

“What does the parable of Lazarus mean, by showing the image of the rich and poor? (Luke 16:19-26) And what does the saying mean, ‘No man can serve two masters, God and mammon?’ (Matthew 6:24), the Lord so terming the love of money. For instance, the covetous, who were invited, did not respond to the invitation to the supper (Luke 14:15-23), not because of their possessing property, but because of their inordinate affection to what they possessed”.

How Does Mammon Affect Us?

Mammon affects us in often very subtle ways, such that our thinking is altered and we are incapable of hearing or understanding what Christ says in the Gospels. For example, many times Christ said that to follow Him meant disposing¹¹ of worldly wealth. The Twelve and the Seventy did this, as did most of the Early Church after Pentecost. John Chrysostom pointed out¹² that the love of wealth can take on a power of its own, and can turn us into incorrigible monsters.

“What is there to hinder us from being saved? Nothing, unless we, ourselves, revolt from Him! And how can we revolt? Hear Him saying, ‘You cannot serve two masters, God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). If we serve God, we shall not submit to the tyranny of mammon. Truly a bitterer thing than any tyranny is the desire for riches. It brings no pleasure, but cares, envy, plotting, hatred, false accusations, many impediments to virtue, indolence, wantonness, greediness, drunkenness, which make even free men to be slaves. Actually they become worse than slaves bought with money, because they are slaves not to men, but to the most grievous of the passions, and maladies of the soul. Such a one dares many things displeasing to God and men, dreading lest any should remove from him this dominion. This is a bitter slavery and devilish tyranny! The most grievous thing of all is that when entangled in such evils we are pleased, we hug our chain, we dwell in a prison house full of darkness, we refuse to come out to the light, but rivet evil upon ourselves, and rejoice in our sickness. So that we cannot be freed, but are in a worse state than those that work the mines, enduring labors and affliction, but not enjoying the fruit. And what is in truth worse than all, if anyone desires to free us from this bitter captivity, we do not

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 6.

¹¹ For example, Matthew 19:21-29, Acts 2:45, 4:34-35, Mark 10:21-30, Luke 12:33-34, Mark 8:34-38, Matthew 6:19-21,

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LIX, 4.

allow it. We are even bothered and displeased, being in a more miserable state than any madmen, since as we are not willing to be delivered from our madness. Was it for this that you were made a man that you might work in these mines, and gather gold? God didn't create you in His Image for this, but that you might please Him, that you might obtain the things to come, that you might join the choir of Angels. Why now do you banish yourself from such a relationship, and thrust yourself into the extreme of dishonor? He, who came by the same spiritual birth pangs with you, is perishing with hunger, and you are bursting with fullness. Your brother goes about with naked body, but you provide garments even for your garments, heaping up all this clothing for the worms”.

Jerome wrote¹³ of examples of covetousness and hypocrisy and contrasted this with the love of God and our neighbor. In all this, he encouraged his people to be content with food and clothing. If we turn this around, we serve mammon and not God.

“You must avoid the sin of covetousness, and this not merely by refusing to seize upon what belongs to others, for that is punished by the laws of the state, but also by not keeping your own property, which is no longer yours. ‘If you have not been faithful’, the Lord says, ‘in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own? (Luke 16:12) That which is another man’s is a quantity of gold, while that which is our own is the spiritual heritage of which it is said, ‘The ransom of a man’s life is his riches’ (Proverbs 13:8). ‘No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). In the language of the Syrians, riches are called mammon. The ‘thorns’, which choke our faith (Matthew 13:7, 22), are the worrying about our life (Matthew 6:25). Care for the things, which the Gentiles seek after, is the root of covetousness.”

“But you will say, ‘I am a girl delicately reared, and I cannot labor with my hands. Suppose that I live to old age and then fall sick; who will take pity on me?’ Hear Jesus speaking to the Apostles, ‘Do not worry about what you shall eat or what you shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Behold the fowls of the air: for they do not sow, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them’ (Matthew 6:25-26). Should clothing fail you, set the lilies before your eyes. Should hunger seize you, think of the words in which the poor and hungry are blessed. Should pain afflict you, read ‘Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities’, and ‘There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to punch me, lest I should be exalted above measure’ (2 Corinthians 12:10, 7). Rejoice in all God’s judgments; for the psalmist says, ‘The daughters of Judah rejoiced because of your judgments, O Lord’ (Psalm 97:8). Let these words be always on your lips, ‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there’ (Job 1:21); and ‘We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out’” (1 Timothy 6:6).

“Today you see women cramming their wardrobes with dresses, and yet are unable to overcome the moths. Rarely does one wear out a single dress, while her closet is full, and Christ lies at the door naked and dying (Matthew 25:35-36).

¹³ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, XXII, 31-32.

When they hold out a hand to the needy they sound a trumpet (Matthew 6:2); when they invite to a love feast¹⁴ they engage a crier. I lately saw the noblest lady in Rome with a band of eunuchs before her in the basilica of the blessed Peter. She was giving money to the poor, a coin apiece; and this with her own hand, that she might be accounted more religious. At that time an old woman, ‘full of years and rags’, ran forward to get a second coin, but when her turn came she received not a penny but a blow hard enough to draw blood from her guilty veins.”

“‘The love of money is the root of all evil’ (1 Timothy 6:10), and Paul speaks of covetousness as being idolatry (Colossians 3:5). ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). The Lord will never allow a righteous soul to perish of hunger. ‘I have been young’, the psalmist says, ‘and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread’ (Psalm 37:25). Ravens fed Elijah (1 Kings 17:4, 6). The widow of Zarephath, who with her sons expected to die the same night, went without food herself that she might feed the prophet. He who had come to be fed then turned feeder, for, by a miracle, he filled the empty barrel (1 Kings 17:9-16). Peter says, ‘Silver and gold I don’t have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk’ (Acts 3:6). But now many, while they do not say it in words, by their deeds declare, ‘Faith and pity I don’t have; but such as I have, silver and gold, these I will not give you’. ‘Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content’ (1 Timothy 6:8). Numberless are the instances in Scripture which teach men to ‘Beware of covetousness’” (Luke 12:15).

One aspect of taking up our Cross has to do with our attachment to worldly goods. John Cassian used¹⁵ a good illustration of this aspect of the Cross to address a problem in a monastic community, where some monks retained their worldly wealth, thinking that this would allow them to be more charitable. Cassian referred to them as double-minded, fearful and lacking faith; they twisted the Scriptures to support their avarice. This applies to the non-monastic also in the sense that many people put too much trust in their wealth.

“Of those who say that they have renounced this world, and afterwards are overcome by lack of faith and are afraid of losing their worldly goods, a charge was given mystically by Moses. ‘If any man is afraid and has a fearful heart, let him not go to war. Let him go back and return home, lest he make the hearts of his brethren as fearful as he himself is timid and frightened’ (Deuteronomy 20:8). What is plainer than this testimony? Does not Scripture clearly prefer that they should not take on even the earliest stages of the monastic profession, rather than by their persuasion and bad example turn others back from the perfection of the Gospel, and weaken them by their faithless terror? And so they are asked to withdraw from the battle and return to their homes, because a man cannot fight the Lord’s battle with a double heart. For ‘a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways!’ (James 1:8) And thinking of that Parable in the Gospel, that he who goes out with ten thousand men against a king who comes with twenty thousand, cannot possibly fight (Luke 14:31-32); they should, while he is yet a great way off, ask for peace. That is, it is better not even to take the first step towards

¹⁴ The love-feast was a meal that either preceded or followed the Eucharist. Because of the problems that occurred at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:21-22, Jude 1:12), the love-feast was eventually discontinued.

¹⁵ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, VII, 15.

renunciation, rather than afterwards to involve themselves in still greater dangers. 'It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay' (Ecclesiastes 5:4 LXX). It is a good description of us as the one coming with ten thousand and the other with twenty. For the number of sins, which attack us, is far larger than that of the virtues, which fight for us. But 'no man can serve God and mammon' (Matthew 6:24). And 'no man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:62).

John Chrysostom stated¹⁶ that the root of covetousness is vainglory, which comes from pride. Jesus had to teach this to His disciples in small steps because they were still trying to overcome the passions. The ultimate antidote for covetousness is the contempt for riches.

"After He cast out the disease of vainglory, and not before, then He introduced His teaching on voluntary poverty. Nothing so trains men to be fond of riches, as the fondness for glory. This is why men devise those herds of slaves, swarms of spokesmen, limousines, silver tables, and all the rest of it. This is not to satisfy any wants, nor to enjoy any pleasure, but that they may make a show before the multitude. Before He had only said that we must show mercy; but here He points out how great mercy we must show. It was not possible at the beginning to introduce His teaching on the contempt of riches all at once, because of the tyranny of the passions; He broke it up into small portions, so that it shall become acceptable". Therefore He said first:

1. "Blessed are the merciful;" and after this,
2. "Agree with your adversary;" and after that,
3. "If anyone will sue you at the law and take your coat, give him your cloak also" (Matthew 5:40). His meaning here refers to things that are much greater than clothes.
4. "If you see a lawsuit impending, do this; since to be deficient and to be freed from fighting is better than to possess and to fight."

"But here, supposing no adversary is at law with you, He teaches the contempt of riches itself by itself. He implies that He makes these laws not so much for the sake of those who receive mercy, as for the giver's sake. Even though there is no one injuring us, or dragging us into court, even so we may despise our possessions, giving them to those that are in need. Even here Jesus maintained the place of an adviser rather than a lawgiver, in His sayings on this subject, for it was not yet time to reveal it." That is, Jesus was leading the Twelve along slowly.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁷ that being nailed to earthly things causes us great harm and makes us slaves instead of freemen. We become like a dog chained to a tomb that barks at everything that comes by.

"Though no problems should come up, He said, you will undergo no small harm, in being nailed to the things below, and in becoming a slave instead of a freeman. You will cast yourself out of the heavenly things, and have no power to think on anything lofty, but all about money, usury, loans, gain, and business deals. What could be more wretched than this? Such a person will be worse off

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XX, 2.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XX, 3.

than any slave, bringing upon himself a most grievous tyranny, and giving up the chief thing of all, even the nobleness and the liberty of man. No matter how much anyone may speak to him, he will not be able to hear any of those things, which concern him, while his mind is nailed down to money. Bound like a dog to a tomb, by the tyranny of riches, more tightly than by any chain, barking at everything that come near him, he has this one employment continually, to keep from others what he has laid up. What can be more wretched than this?"

John Chrysostom also examined¹⁸ the manner in which mammon affects us by looking closely at the ex-Apostle Judas. Judas went everywhere with Christ for three years and watched Him heal the sick and raise the dead. He was even sent out with the rest of the Twelve to heal the sick and raise the dead himself (Matthew 10:4). But he was also incorrigible as a thief because of his love for money, and this led him to betray his Master and benefactor for 30 pieces of silver (John 12:5-6, Matthew 26:15). Covetousness overcame Judas, and nothing that Jesus said or did could counteract the darkness created by his covetousness. This darkness is an extremely powerful influence and there are many like Judas in every town and in every country, and we are warned not to imitate them.

"Tell me, why did Judas betray Jesus? He called him, when he was a man unmarked and unknown. He made him one of the Twelve, He gave him a share in His teaching, He promised him ten thousand good things, He caused him to work wonders. He was a sharer of the same table, the same journeys, the same company, the same conversation and teaching as the rest. These things were not sufficient to restrain him. For what reason did he betray Him? What did Judas have to charge Him with? Rather, what good did he not receive at His hands? Jesus knew Judas' mind, and still did not cease to do His part. He often said, 'One of you shall betray Me' (Matthew 26:21). He often marked Judas, and yet spared him, and though He knew him to be such a one, yet He did not cast him out of the band. He still bore with him, He still honored him, and loved him, as a true disciple, and as one of the Twelve. Last of all, He took a towel, and with His own hands He washed Judas' polluted feet, and even this did not keep him back. Judas stole the things of the poor, and that Judas might not go on to greater sin, Jesus bore this too. Nothing persuaded Judas. Had he been a beast, or a stone, he might have been changed by these kindnesses towards him, by these wonders, by these teachings. Though He was thus brutalized, yet Jesus still called him, and by wondrous works He drew him to Himself, even though Judas was more senseless than a stone. Yet for none of these things did Judas become better".

"You wonder perhaps at the folly of the traitor; therefore dread the thing that wounded him. He became such from avarice, from the love of money. Cut out this passion, for to these diseases does it give birth; it makes us impious, and causes us to be ignorant of God, though we have received ten thousand benefits at His hands. Cut it out, I entreat you, it is no common disease, it knows how to give birth to a thousand destructive deaths. We have seen his tragedy. Let us fear lest we too fall into the same snares. For this is it written, that we should not suffer the same things. All four Evangelists included it in their Gospels, that they might restrain us. Covetousness does not consist in just the love of a lot of money, but in loving money at all. It is grievous avarice to desire more than we

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philipians, VI.

need. Was it hundreds of pounds of gold that persuaded Judas? For thirty pieces of silver he betrayed his Lord. Covetousness is not shown just in receiving a lot, but rather in receiving little things. Judas committed a great crime for a little silver”.

“It cannot be that an avaricious man should ever see the face of Christ! This is one of the things that are impossible. It is a root of evils, and if he that possesses one evil thing, falls from glory, where shall he stand who carries with him the root? He who is the servant of money cannot be a true servant of Christ. Christ Himself has declared that the thing is impossible. ‘You cannot serve God and mammon’, and, ‘No man can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24), for they lay upon us contrary orders. Christ says, ‘Spare the poor’; mammon says, ‘Even from the naked strip off the things they have’. Christ says, ‘Empty yourself of what you have’; mammon says, ‘Take also what you have not’. Do you see the opposition; do you see the conflict?”

“How can a man easily obey both; he must despise one! This does not need proof. We see continuously that Christ is despised, and mammon is honored? If even the words are painful, how much more painful is the thing itself? But it does not appear so painful in reality, because we are possessed with the disease. If the soul is cleansed of a little of the disease, it can judge right; but when it goes somewhere else, it may be seized by the fever, engaged in the pleasure of the thing, and its perception may not be clear. Christ says, ‘Whoever of you that does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple’ (Luke 14:33); mammon says, ‘Take the bread from the hungry’. Christ says, ‘Cover the naked’ (Isaiah 58:7); the other says, ‘Strip the naked’. Christ says, ‘You shall not hide yourself from your own flesh’, (Isaiah 58:7) and those of your own house; mammon says, ‘You shall not pity those of your own seed; though you see your mother or your father in want, despise them’. And mammon is obeyed! He who commands us to be cruel, mad and brutal is listened to rather than He who bids us to be gentle and healthful! Hell, fire and a worm that doesn’t die are appointed for this”.

We might contrast this image of the wealthy as grasping and covetous with Job and Abraham, who were both very wealthy, yet they were in control of their wealth and used it to help others. Abraham is remembered as a “Friend of God” for his hospitality to strangers, where the three strangers turned out to be Christ and two angels (Genesis 18:1-10). Job is remembered for his perseverance under unjust persecution, where prior to his persecution, he had been very actively helping the poor (Job 29:14-17).

Ambrose of Milan referred to¹⁹ the righteous Job is a good example of showing mercy to the poor.

“Do you wonder at the judgment of God in the case of holy Job? Wonder rather at his virtue, in that he could say, ‘I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case *that* I did not know’ (Job 29:15-16). Their shoulders were made warm with the skins of my lambs. The stranger didn’t dwell at my gates, but my door was open to everyone that came. Clearly blessed is he from whose house a poor man has never gone

¹⁹ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, xi, 36-39.

with empty hand. Nor again is anyone more blessed than he who is sensible to the needs of the poor, and the hardships of the weak and helpless. In the Day of Judgment he will receive salvation from the Lord, Whom he will have as his debtor for the mercy he has shown.”

John Chrysostom also encouraged²⁰ us to honor and accept the poor man, because Christ accepts him also. The poor man does not have the obstacles that a rich man does for entry to the Kingdom of Heaven, and both are welcomed equally at the Lord’s Table.

“Do not be ashamed when called upon by a poor man; if he should draw near, if he should catch your knees, do not shake him off. For these are admirable dogs of the Royal Courts. I do not call them dogs as dishonoring them, but highly commending them. They guard the King’s court; therefore feed them, for the honor passes on to the King. Everything is pride regarding the palaces on earth; but here everything is humility. From these people, you are taught that God does not delight in riches. For their sitting and assembling is an admonition regarding the nature of all men, saying that human things are nothing, that they are shadow and smoke. If God admits rich people, He admits them not that they may continue rich, but that they may be delivered from their encumbrance. For hear what Christ says to them, ‘You cannot serve God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24); and again, ‘It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven’; and, ‘It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 19:23, 24). On this account He receives the rich, that they may hear these words, that they may long for the eternal riches, that they may covet things in heaven. God does not refuse to call the poor to His spiritual Table, and make them partakers of that Feast. But the maimed, the lame, the old man that is clothed in rags, comes to partake of that Table with the young and the beautiful, and even with him who is clothed in purple, and whose head is encircled with a crown, and is thought worthy of the spiritual Feast. Both enjoy the same benefits, and there is no difference”.

Serving Mammon Is Idolatry

If one cannot serve God and mammon, the implication is that mammon somehow represents another god. Most people are not conscious of this, and many may think they are being good Christians while they serve mammon.

John Chrysostom stated²¹ that it is impossible for God and mammon to agree. Their aims and objects are so different.

“God has once for all declared it impossible for mammon and God to agree. Do not say, ‘it is possible’. How is it possible that these should agree when the one master is commanding you to acquire by violence, the other to strip yourself of your possessions; the one to be chaste, the other to commit fornication; the one to be drunken and luxurious, the other to keep the belly in subjection? One despises the things that are, the other is riveted to present things; the one admires marble, walls, and roofs, the other treats these with contempt, but honors self-restraint; how is it possible that these should agree?”

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, XI.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXI, 2.

“Now He calls mammon ‘a master’ (Matthew 6:24), not because of its own nature, but on account of the wretchedness of them that bow themselves beneath it. So also He calls ‘the belly a God’ (Philippians 3:19), not from the dignity of such a mistress, but from the wretchedness of them that are enslaved. It is worse than any punishment, and it is vengeance on him who is involved in it. For what condemned criminals can be so wretched, as they who have God for their Lord (that is, good Christian people) and desert to this grievous tyranny? This brings them so much harm even in this life. By doing so, their loss is unspeakable; there are lawsuits, annoyances, fighting, hard work, and a blinding of the soul. The most grievous thing of all is that one falls away from the highest blessings; for such a blessing it is to be God’s servant.”

Chrysostom elaborated²² on how covetousness is idolatry. First, covetousness denies the sovereignty of God and sets the pursuit of wealth above it. Second, it shows contempt for God and draws others away from His service. Third, true worship means doing the will of one’s master, whether God or mammon; if one is doing the will of mammon, one is worshipping it.

“Some say that the words, ‘the covetous man is an idolater’ (Ephesians 5:5), are an exaggeration. However, the statement is not exaggerated, it is true. Because the covetous man apostatizes from God, just as the idolater does. There is a declaration of Christ, which says, ‘You cannot serve God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). If then it is not possible to serve God and mammon, they who serve mammon have thrown themselves out of the service of God; and they who have denied His sovereignty, and serve lifeless gold, it is plain that they are idolaters.”

“‘But I never made an idol’, a man will say, ‘nor set up an altar, nor sacrificed sheep, nor poured libations of wine. I came into the church, and lifted up my hands to the Only-begotten Son of God; I partake of the mysteries; I communicate in prayer, and in everything else which is a Christian’s duty. ‘How then’, he will say, ‘am I a worshiper of idols?’ This is the most astonishing thing of all for those who have ‘tasted’ the loving-kindness of God, and ‘have seen that the Lord is gracious’ (Psalm 34:8). Having done this and then to abandon Him who is gracious, and take to themselves a cruel tyrant, and pretend to be serving God, is in reality submitting yourself to the hard and galling yoke of covetousness. Partaking of the mysteries and communicating in prayer speak only of your Master’s gifts; it does not speak of what it is our duty to do.”

“Tell me, on what basis do we judge a soldier? Is it when he is on duty guarding the king, and is fed by him, and called the king’s own, or is it when he is minding his own affairs and interests? If he pretends to be with the king, and to be attentive to his interests, while he is advancing the cause of the enemy, we declare this to be worse than if he breaks away from the king’s service, and joins the enemy. If you are showing contempt to God, just as an idolater does, it is not with your own mouth that you do so, but also with the mouths of all those whom you influence with your traitorous behavior. Whenever they say, ‘Oh! That Christian, that covetous fellow!’, not only is the traitor himself committing outrage by his own act, but he forces those whom he has influenced to use these

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVIII, vv. 5-6.

curse words also. Even if they don't use these words, their reverence for the things of God is affected.”

“When we say that the pagan idolater worships idols, he will sometimes say, ‘No, but it is Venus, or it is Mars’. And if we say, ‘Who is this Venus?’, the more modest among them will say, ‘It is pleasure’. Or what is this Mars? ‘It is wrath’. And in the same way some people worship mammon. If we say, ‘Who is this mammon?’ It is covetousness, and this you are worshipping. “I do not worship it’, you will say. Because you don’t bow yourself down? But you are far more a worshiper in your deeds and practices; for this is the higher kind of worship. And that you may understand this, look at the case of God! Who is it that more truly worships Him, they who merely stand up at the prayers, or they who do His will? Clearly enough, these latter! The same also applies to the worshipers of mammon; they who do his will are truly his worshipers. However, they who worship the passions are sometimes free from the passions. One may see a worshiper of Mars sometimes governing his wrath. But this is not true of some of the covetous, who make themselves a slave to their passion.”

Where Can Those Serve Whose Only Gifts Are with Mammon?

Some people have a gift for handling money, investments or managing large accounts. If they don't have gift for doing things in the Church, where can they serve? Gregory the Great stated²³ that there is a place in the Church even for those who have no spiritual gifts. Even if they are not wise in spiritual things, they can preside over and judge earthly things. The priests should not be weighed down judging earthly matters, but should delegate that to others just as Moses was advised to do by Jethro. The issue is holiness; those who are not able to move in this direction very much can still serve by freeing the priests to seek spiritual things.

“When Christ wanted to restrain us from gluttony, He said, ‘Take heed to yourselves that your hearts aren't weighted down with carousing, drunkenness, cares of this life, and that Day come upon you unexpectedly’ (Luke 21:34). He even declares the manner of that coming, saying, ‘it will come as a snare on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth’ (Luke 21:35). Again He says, ‘No man can serve two masters’ (Luke 16:13). Hence Paul withdraws the minds of the godly from consort with the world, ‘No one engaged in warfare for God entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier (2 Timothy 2:4). To the rulers of the Church he says, ‘If then you should have judgments pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed²⁴ in the church (1 Corinthians 6:4); that is, that those persons who have no spiritual gifts should devote themselves to earthly charges. It is as if he had said more plainly, ‘Since they are incapable of penetrating the inmost things, let them at any rate employ themselves externally in necessary things’. Hence Moses, who spoke with God (Exodus 18:17, 18), was judged by the reproof of Jethro, because he devoted himself to the peoples’ earthly affairs. Counsel was given to him too, that he should appoint others for settling earthly quarrels, and he

²³ Gregory the Great, The Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 7.

²⁴ See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XVI, 6. Chrysostom interpreted Paul's words as saying that it would be better to establish someone who is not wise and of no account in the Church to judge earthly matters in the Church than to have outsiders preside in judgment. By persons “of no account”, Paul does not refer to the Church's outcasts, but merely finds fault with taking the case before unbelievers.

himself should be more free to learn spiritual secrets for the instruction of the people.”

“With what conscience can the overseer of souls find benefit, while engaged himself in earthly cares, which it was his duty to reprove of in others? This is what the Lord, in the wrath of just retribution, said, ‘And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.’ (Hosea 4:9). For the priest is as the people, when one who bears a spiritual office acts as do others, who are still under judgment regarding fleshly pursuits. In the great sorrow of his love, Jeremiah deplores the destruction of the temple, saying, ‘How the gold has become dim! The most excellent color is changed! The stones of the sanctuary are scattered at the head of every street.’ (Lamentations 4:1). By gold, which surpasses all other metals, is expressed the excellence of holiness. The most excellent color expresses the reverence about godliness, which is lovely to all men. The stones of the sanctuary signify persons in the clergy. The streets signify the latitude of this present life. Gold, therefore, becomes dim when a life of holiness is polluted by earthly doings; the most excellent color is changed, when the previous reputation of persons who were living godly lives is diminished. When anyone, after a habit of holiness, mixes himself up with earthly doings, it is as though his color were changed, and the reverence that surrounded him grew pale and was disregarded in the eyes of men. The stones of the sanctuary are poured out into the streets, when those who should have been free to penetrate internal mysteries in the secret places of the tabernacle, seek out the broad ways of secular causes outside. For to this end they were made stones of the sanctuary, that they might appear in the vestment of the high-priest within the holy of holies.”

Worrying About Tomorrow

Jesus went on at length regarding food, clothing and concern about the future. He compared us to the irrational creatures and to grass and lilies. The Gentile nations pursue all these things since they have no other choice. However, the Twelve Apostles, to whom He was speaking, had left behind their jobs, their property and their livelihood. They had started living like the lilies of the field, and they would continue to do so on their missionary journeys the rest of their lives. The Early Church after Pentecost lived this way also, as did all the early monastic communities. There is more to what Jesus said than one might gather from a cursory reading. He said,

“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit²⁵ to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

²⁵ A cubit was the length from a man’s elbow to his fingertip, or about 18 inches.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:26-34)

In emphasizing the transient nature of food and clothing, Jesus used the illustration of grass being thrown into the oven. This was a reference to bread-baking ovens in ancient times. In order to feed the fire in a stone or brick igloo-shaped oven, dry vegetation and stubble were gathered and thrown in to get it hot. After the oven was hot, and the fire went out, bread dough was put in and the small opening to the oven was closed off until the bread was done. In the hot, dry conditions present in the Middle East, green plants could turn to dry stubble in a matter of a few days as soon as the roots ran out of moisture. The lilies Jesus referred to had broad leaves and a heavy stalk and thus made good fuel for the bread-baking ovens when they were dry. Compared to eternity, our lives in this flesh are comparable to lilies that are beautiful one day and dry stubble the next.

This illustration of birds and flowers is not an injunction against thoughtful planning and care for one's situation but is directed against the cares of this world. Four times in this Gospel lesson, the Lord said "do not worry" (i.e. do not be anxious) about something as follows:

- One's life: food and drink (Matthew 6:25, 31)
- One's body: clothing (Matthew 6:25, 31)
- Worrying can't add one cubit to one's stature (Matthew 6:27)
- Do not worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34)

However, the Gentiles (i.e. pagan foreign nations) do seek after these things as a first priority. Instead, He asks us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; and He promised that all these things will be added to us. [This is covered as a separate topic later.] He is simply asking us to trust in His goodness with a simple child-like trust that He will provide. And one can't get much more simple in one's outlook than birds and flowers, who are totally dependent on their day-to-day circumstances for food and nourishment.

John Chrysostom spoke²⁶ about what the term "trouble" meant, when the Lord said, "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble". This "trouble" is heaven-sent as discipline for our sins, and to break us away from our attachment to worrying about the things of this world.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for sufficient for the day is its own trouble' (Matthew 6:34); that is to say, the bruising of daily life. Is it not enough for you, to eat your bread in the sweat of your face? Why add the further affliction that comes from anxiety, when you are about to be delivered from all this?"

"By 'trouble' here He means, not wickedness, but calamities; much as in another place He said, 'Is there evil in a city, which the Lord has not done?' (Amos 3:6 LXX) He does not mean plunder, injuries, or anything like these, but the natural disasters which come from above. And again He said, 'I make peace, and create evils' (Isaiah 45:7 LXX). He does not speak of wickedness, but of famines, pestilence, and things accounted evil by most men; people generally tend to call these things evil. For example, the priests and prophets of those five

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXII, 5.

Philistine lordships, when they yoked the cows to the ark, they let them go without their calves, and gave the name of 'evil' to those heaven-sent plagues (1 Samuel 6), and the dismay and anguish, which sprang up within them.”

“This then is His meaning here also, when He said, ‘sufficient for the day is its own trouble’. Nothing so pains the soul, as cares and anxiety. Thus did Paul also, when urging to celibacy, give counsel, saying, ‘I want you to be without worldly cares’” (1 Corinthians 7:32).

“But when He said, ‘tomorrow will worry about its own things’ (Matthew 6:34), He didn’t say that the day itself worried about these things, but He spoke to a people, who were imperfect.”

Jerome wrote²⁷ of an incident that occurred in his days concerning one of a number of monks in a monastic community in Egypt. This example serves to illustrate how seriously and literally they considered the Lord’s words about the birds and the flowers.

“A brother living at Nitria a few years ago, more thrifty than covetous, and ignorant that the Lord had been sold for thirty pieces of silver, left behind him at his death a hundred pieces of gold which he had earned by weaving linen. As there were about five thousand monks in the neighborhood, living in 5000 separate cells, a council was held as to what should be done. Some said that the coins should be distributed among the poor; others that they should be given to the Church, while others were for sending them back to the relatives of the deceased. However, Macarius, Pambo, Isidore and the rest of those called fathers, speaking by the Spirit, decided that they should be interred with their owner, with the words, ‘Your money perish with you’ (Acts 8:20). And let no one suppose that this was a cruel act. So great fear has fallen upon all throughout Egypt, that it is now a crime to leave one gold piece behind”.

Consider the Irrational Creatures and the Lilies

The irrational creatures refer to all the animal kingdom except man, and who do not have the ability to reason. The lilies (or grass of the field) that is thrown into the oven refers to thick-stalked plants that dry out during the hot Mid-East summer.

Clement of Alexandria stated²⁸ that it is instructive to observe the irrational creatures, since they don’t eat when they’re not hungry. All things were made for man, but it is not good to use everything all the time.

“It was chiefly for men’s sake that all things were made, yet it is not good to use all things, all the time. For the occasion, the time, the mode, and the intention, refer to what is useful, for one who is rightly instructed. This has influence in putting a stop to a life of gluttony, which wealth is prone to choose. This does not refer to that wealth, which sees clearly, but that abundance which makes a man blind with reference to gluttony. No one is poor regarding necessities, and a man is never overlooked. For there is one God who feeds the fowls, the fishes, and the irrational creatures; and not one thing whatever is lacking to them, though ‘they do not worry about their food’ (Matthew 6:25). We are better than they, being their lords, and more closely allied to God, as being

²⁷ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, XX, 33.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, II, 1.

wiser. And we were made, not that we might eat and drink, but that we might devote ourselves to the knowledge of God. For the just man who eats is satisfied in his soul, but the belly of the wicked shall want, filled with the appetites of insatiable gluttony. Now lavish expense is adapted not for enjoyment alone, but also for social communication. Therefore we must guard against those articles of food, which persuade us to eat when we are not hungry.”

John Chrysostom compared²⁹ human physical characteristics with those of the irrational creatures. Man comes out a distant second on all points.

“Are you handsome and beautiful? This is the boast of crows! You are not fairer than the peacock, as regards either its color or its plumage; the bird beats you in plumage, and far surpasses you in its feathers and in its color. The swan is very good looking, and many other birds, with whom if you are compared you will see that you are nothing. Often worthless boys, unmarried girls, harlots, and effeminate men boast like this. Is this then a cause for haughtiness?”

“Are you rich? What do you have? Gold, silver, precious stones! This is the boast of robbers, murderers, those who work in the mines. That which is the labor of criminals becomes to you a boast! Do you adorn and deck yourself out? We see horses also decked out, and among the Persians camels too. As for men, there are all those who star on stage and screen. Are you not ashamed to boast of these things, if unreasoning animals, slaves, murderers, the effeminate, robbers, and tomb-raiders share this with you?”

“Do you build splendid palaces? Many jackdaws³⁰ dwell in more splendid houses, and have more noble retreats. Have you ever seen how many covetous people have built houses in fields and desert places that end up being retreats for jackdaws?”

“Perhaps you are proud on account of your voice. You can by no means sing with clearer and sweeter tones than the swan or the nightingale. Is it for your varied knowledge of arts? But what is wiser than the bee in this; what embroiderer, what painter, what geometrician, can imitate her honeycomb? Is it for the fineness of your apparel? But here the spiders beat you. Is it for the swiftness of your feet? Again the first prize is with unreasoning animals, the hare, and the gazelle. Have you traveled much? Not more than the birds; they migrate more easily, they have no need of provisions for the way, for their wings are all sufficient for them. Are you clear sighted? Not as the gazelle; not as the eagle. Are you quick of hearing? The donkey is more so. Do you have a good sense of smell? The hound won’t let you surpass him. Are you a good provider? Yet you are inferior to the ant. Do you gather gold? Yet not as the Indian ants!³¹ Are you proud because of your health? Unreasoning creatures are far better than we are both in bodily habit, and in independence; they fear no poverty. ‘Look at the birds of the heaven, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns’ (Matthew 6:26). ‘And surely,’ He means, ‘God has not created the irrational animals superior to us.’ He, whose proud mind is lifted up above all

²⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians*, VII.

³⁰ A jackdaw is a crow-like bird that lives in towns and villages of Europe and Africa. It builds nests in towers, and often conceals small bright objects in its nests.

³¹ For a recent article on The Indian Gold-Digging “Ants”, see the Appendix to this Study.

men, is actually even lower than the irrational creatures with respect to physical characteristics.”

John Chrysostom noted³² that the lilies that surpassed Solomon in beauty are very unimportant, since they are beautiful one day and burned the next. Why did God waste effort making them beautiful? He did this to demonstrate to us, who are the most important part of His Kingdom that He will provide for us.

“The beauty of the flowers surpassed Solomon, not once or twice, but throughout his reign. He, who was more glorious than all kings that ever was, acknowledged his inferiority.”

“Christ instructed us, not to aim at all at such ornament. In the end, after its moment of triumph ‘the flower is cast into the oven’ (Matthew 6:30). If of lowly and worthless things that are of no great use, God has displayed so great care, how shall He give up on you, of all living creatures the most important? Why then did He make them so beautiful? He did this that He might display His own wisdom and the excellence of His power; that from everything we might learn His glory. For not only ‘the Heavens declare the glory of God’ (Psalm 19:1), but the earth too; and this David declared when he said, ‘Praise the Lord, you fruitful trees, and all cedars’ (Psalm 148:9). Some by their fruits, some by their greatness, some by their beauty, send up praise to Him who made them. This too is a sign of great excellence of wisdom, when even on things that are very unimportant He pours out such great beauty. And what can be of less importance than that which today is, and tomorrow is not? If then to the grass He has given that which it doesn’t need, how shall He not give to you what you do need? That is, the beauty of the lilies doesn’t help in feeding the fire; therefore it is not needed. If that which is the least important of all things, He has lavishly adorned, not for need, but out of great generosity, how much more will He honor you, the most honorable of all things, in matters which are necessary.”

John Chrysostom continued to say³³ that our fear of poverty is irrational in the light of the history of the people of God. There is no record of anyone in the history of mankind who trusted in God yet went hungry. Wealth, on the other hand, usually brings more trouble than poverty.

“Why do you tremble at poverty? Is it because of hunger, thirst or cold? There is no one who is ever destitute in these things! ‘Look at the generations of old, and see; did anyone ever trust in the Lord, and was forsaken; or did anyone hope in Him, and was made ashamed?’” (Psalm 37:25)

“Again, ‘look at the birds of the heaven, that they don’t sow, they don’t reap, they don’t gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feeds them’ (Matthew 6:26). No one can readily point out to us anyone who has perished by hunger and cold. Why then do you tremble at poverty? You cannot say! If you have necessities enough, why do you tremble at it? Is it because you don’t have a multitude of servants? This is happiness; this is freedom from care. Is it because your dishes, couches, and furniture are not made of silver? What greater enjoyment does he have who possesses everything made of silver? The use is the

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXII, 1.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philipians, II.

same, whether they are of this or that material. Is it because you are not an object of fear to the many? May you never become so! For what pleasure is it that any should stand in dread of you? Is it because you are afraid of others? 'If you would like to have no fear of the authority, do that which is good, and you shall have praise from the authorities' (Romans 13:3). Does anyone say, 'It is because we are subject to contempt, and apt to be mistreated? It is not poverty but wickedness which causes this; for many poor men have quietly passed through life, while rulers, the rich and the powerful have ended their days more wretchedly than evil doers, bandits and grave-robbers. What poverty brings in your case, wealth does in theirs. What those who might mistreat you do because of your poverty and contemptible estate, they do to the wealthy from envy and the evil eye. This occurs more with the wealthy than with the poor, for envy is a stronger driver to mistreat another. He who envies does everything with all his might, while the despiser often has pity on the despised; his poverty and lack of power has often been the cause of his deliverance.'

The problem most people have with Christ's words encouraging us to live like the birds and the flowers is that we can't believe that people can actually do this. This seems like such a radical departure from how others around us live that we think that it's impossible. However, we become very much like the habitual drunkard who doesn't believe that sobriety exists. John Chrysostom put it³⁴ this way:

"It is clear that not our diligence, but the providence of God, affects everything. Were He to forsake us, no care, anxiety, work, or any other such thing that we might do will ever come to anything, but all will utterly pass away. Let us not suppose His commandments are impossible; for there are many who routinely perform them today. And if we don't happen to know of them, it is nothing marvelous; Elijah also supposed he was alone, but was told, 'I have left for Myself seven thousand men' (1 Kings 19:18, Romans 11:4). It is clear that there are many who show forth the apostolic life; like the 'three thousand' and the 'five thousand' (Acts 2:41, 4:4). And if we don't believe this is true, it is not because there are none who do it, but because we are far from doing it. This is like the drunkard who doesn't believe anyone drinks only water; or convincing the playboy that it is easy to live in virginity; or persuading the extortioner that there are people who readily give up even their own goods as alms. Those who daily melt themselves down with innumerable anxieties will not easily receive this. There are many, who have attained this, and we might show it from those, who have practiced this self-denial in our generation. But for most people, it is enough to learn not to covet, and that almsgiving is a good thing."

Chrysostom continued³⁵ to say that all of our fears are really irrational, and that this really does make sense.

"'Is not the soul more than food, and the body more than the clothing?' (Matthew 6:25) He that has given the greater, how shall He not give the lesser? He that has fashioned the flesh that is fed, how shall He not give the food? He did not simply say, 'Do not worry about what you shall eat', or 'how you shall be

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXI, 5.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXI, 3.

clothed'; but He adds, 'Do not worry about the body', since from these He was to make His demonstrations, speaking in the way of comparison."

John Chrysostom stated³⁶ that it is the ungodly, who pose objections to the comparison to birds and flowers. Christ could have made comparison to those who lived as He asked, not worrying about food and clothing, such as Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist. If He did, they would have objected that they have not yet become like these saints. Even the Old Testament spoke of the bee, the ant and the swallow as examples of how to live one's life.

"Some of the ungodly have attacked Christ's illustration. They say that it was improper to speak in terms of strengthening moral principle, and then use the natural advantages of the birds as comparisons. To those animals, they have this by nature. What then shall we say to this? Even though it is theirs by nature, yet possibly we too may attain it by choice. For He didn't say, 'look at how the birds fly', which was something impossible to man. But that they are fed without worrying, is an easy thing to be achieved by us also, if we want. Some have accomplished this in their actions."

"We can admire the consideration of our Lawgiver, in that He might have brought forward His illustration from among Moses, Elijah and John the Baptist, and others like them, who did not worry. In order that He might touch them more to the point, He mentioned the irrational creatures. For had He spoken of those righteous men, objectors might have said, 'We have not yet become like them'. But by passing them over in silence, and bringing forward the birds of the air, He has cut off from them every excuse, imitating the old Law. For the Old Covenant likewise sends us to the bee and to the ant (Proverbs 6:6-8 LXX), to the turtledove and to the swallow (Jeremiah 8:7). This is no small sign of honor, when the same sort of things, which those creatures possess by nature, those we are able to accomplish by an act of our choice. If He takes great care of the birds, which exist for our sakes, much more will He take care of us. If He takes care of the servants, much more will He take care of the master! They do not sow, neither do they reap' (Matthew 6:26). 'Does this mean' said one, 'that we must not sow?' He didn't say, 'we must not sow', but 'we must not worry'; He didn't say that we shouldn't work, but that we shouldn't rack our self with cares. We should be nourished, but not in 'worrying.'"

"Of this David lays the foundation, saying enigmatically, 'You open Your hand, and fill every living thing with pleasure' (Psalm 145:16); and again, 'To Him that gives to the cattle their food, and to the young ravens that call upon Him'" (Psalm 147:9).

"'Who then', it may be said, 'has not worried?' Remember Jacob, departing from his father's house, destitute of all things? Hear him praying, 'If the Lord gives me bread to eat and clothing to put on?' (Genesis 28:20), which was not the part of one worrying, but of one seeking everything from God. This the apostles also attained, who left everything, and didn't worry; also, the 'five thousand', and the 'three thousand'" (Acts 4:4, 2:41).

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXI, 4.

The Gentiles Seek Luxury; Consider the Twelve Apostles

The Lord said that the Gentiles, or the nations of the world, seek the things of the world as a first priority. But this should not be the case with His people, who are not “of this world” (John 8:23, 1 John 4:5-6). If we seek the kingdom of God as a first priority, our needs will be taken care of.

Clement of Alexandria connected³⁷ a seeking of the things of this world with greed, pride, gluttony and luxury, which cause men to waver from the truth.

“The Scripture says, ‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink’ (Matthew 6:25). To worry about these things argues greed and luxury. Now eating, considered merely by itself, is a necessity. Whatever is beyond that is superfluous, and the Scripture declares to be of the devil. The connected expression makes the meaning plain. Having said, ‘Seek not what you shall eat, or what you shall drink’ (Matthew 6:31), He added, ‘do not worry about tomorrow’ (Matthew 6:34). Now pride and luxury make men waver from the truth; and the indulging in them, leads away from the truth. Wherefore He says very beautifully, ‘All these things the nations of the world seek after’ (Matthew 6:32). The nations are the foolish and those of loose morals. The things, which He specifies, are luxury, sensual gratification, rich cooking, dainty feeding and gluttony. We are naturally given to seeking; let us not destroy the faculty of seeking by directing it to luxury, but let us excite it to the discovery of truth. For He says, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God, and the materials of sustenance shall be added to you’” (Matthew 6:33).

Tertullian gave examples³⁸ of things that we consider the “necessities of life”, but are often just excuses for not taking up our Crosses.

“In vain do we flatter ourselves as to the necessities of human maintenance, if we say, ‘I have no means to live’! The Lord gave examples taking away all excuse. For what is it you say? ‘I shall be in need’. But the Lord calls the needy happy (Luke 6:20). ‘I shall have no food’. But ‘think not’, says He, ‘about food’ (Matthew 6:25, 31; Luke 12:22-24); and as an example of clothing we have the lilies (Matthew 6:28-29, Luke 12:27-28). One might say, ‘My work was my subsistence’. No, but ‘all things are to be sold, and divided to the needy’ (Matthew 19:21, Luke 18:22). One might say, ‘But provision must be made for children and posterity’. Yet, ‘No one, putting his hand on the plow, and looking back, is fit for work’ (Luke 9:62). One might say, ‘But I was under contract’. Yet, ‘No one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). If you wish to be the Lord’s disciple, it is necessary that you ‘take your cross, and follow³⁹ the Lord’. Your cross; that is, your own straits and tortures, or your body only, which is after the manner of a cross. Parents, wives, children, will have to be left behind⁴⁰, for God’s sake. Do you hesitate about arts, trades, and about professions, for the sake of children and parents? Even there was it

³⁷ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, II, 11.

³⁸ Tertullian, On Idolatry, I, ii, 12.

³⁹ See Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, 14:27.

⁴⁰ See Matthew 19:27-30, Mark 10:29-30, Luke 14:26. For example, four of the Twelve were married and three had young children when the Lord called them. In leaving everything for God’s sake, they didn’t abandon their wives and children, but just gave up the pleasures of the flesh, living as celibates.

demonstrated to us that both handicrafts and trades are to be left behind for the Lord's sake. James and John, called by the Lord, left behind both father and ship⁴¹. Matthew was roused up from the tollbooth⁴²; even burying a father was not related to faith (Luke 9:59-60). None of them, whom the Lord chose, said to Him, 'I have no means to live'. Faith does not fear famine. It knows, likewise, that hunger is to be despised no less, for God's sake, than every kind of death. If one does not fear for one's own life; why should one be concerned about adequate food?"

If we consider the example that the Twelve Apostles set, however, we get a much different perspective on what the Lord is saying, and how it is possible to live the Christian life. They had no worldly possessions besides the clothes on their back, and they depended on people they met for everything. John Chrysostom explained⁴³ that what they were giving was labor, and what they were receiving was their due wages from the people they served.

"But perhaps someone may say, 'not having a moneybag for the journey, neither two coats, a staff, or shoes' (Matthew 10:9-10), why did He ask the Apostles to do this? He was training them for perfection; earlier He had allowed them not to worry even about the next day. He was about to send them out as teachers to the whole world. Therefore to men He makes them look like angels (so to speak). By releasing them from all worldly care, He intended that they should be possessed with one care alone, that of their teaching. Or rather He released them even from that, saying, 'Do not worry about how or what you should speak'" (Matthew 10:19).

"What might seem to be galling, He shows is especially light and easy for them. Nothing makes men so cheerful as being freed from anxiety; especially when, after being freed, they lack nothing. God was present, and His Presence took the place of all things".

"Next, lest they should say, 'How are we to obtain our necessary food?', He did not say just 'Behold the fowls of the air'; for they were not yet able to realize this commandment in their actions. But He added what came far short of this, saying, 'For a worker is worthy of his food' (Matthew 10:10), declaring that they must be nourished by their disciples. This way they won't look down on those whom they were teaching, as though they were giving everything and receiving nothing at their hands. This also avoids a situation where their disciples might break away, because they were despised by their teachers".

"After this, in order that they may not say, 'Do you command us to live by begging?' and be ashamed of this, He calls the thing a debt, both by calling them 'laborers', and by calling what was given, 'wages' (Luke 10:7, 1 Timothy 5:18). 'Do not think', He said, 'because the labor is in words, that the benefit conferred by you is small; for the thing involves much work. Whatever they that are taught may give, it is not a free gift, which they give you, but a recompense which they render; 'for the laborer is worthy of his wages'. He said this, not as declaring the value of the Apostles' labors, but as both making it a law for them to seek nothing more, and as convincing the givers, that what they do is not an act of liberality, but a debt".

⁴¹ Matthew 4:21-22, Mark 1:19-20, Luke 5:10-11.

⁴² Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-29.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 7.

Seek the Kingdom First; All This Will Be Added

The Lord said, “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:31-33).

What does it mean to seek the Kingdom of God first? And how will “all these things” be added to us? And what things does He say will be added? There are a number of different aspects to this.

Use of the Things of This World

Clement of Alexandria noted⁴⁴ the practice of Christian women of his day to be fixated on the use of jewels, gold and pearls for personal adornment. They reasoned that they should be able to use the things that God made. Clement argued from the point of view of the Early Church, where everyone had all things in common. It seemed wrong to him for the rich to command extra shares while some poor people don’t have enough to eat. Better, he said, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to spend money on human beings rather than on jewels and gold.

“Children, on seeing fire, rush to it, are attracted by its brightness, but do not understand the danger of touching it. Such is the case with the jewels (amethysts, diamonds, topaz, etc.) which women wear fastened to chains and set in necklaces.”

“And the highly prized pearl has invaded women’s apartments to an extravagant extent. This is produced in an oyster, and is about the size of a large fish’s eye. Women are not ashamed of the great pain it took this little oyster to produce the pearl, when they adorn themselves with it. The Scripture has also called the Word of God a pearl” (Matthew 13:45-46).

“We have heard, too, that the Jerusalem above is walled with sacred stones (Revelation 21:18-21); and we understand that the twelve gates of the celestial city (twelve pearls), by being made like precious stones, indicate the transcendent grace of the apostolic voice⁴⁵. For the colors are laid in precious stones, and these colors are precious; while the other parts remain of earthy material. The city of the saints, which is spiritually built, is walled with these symbolically. By that brilliancy of stones is meant the inimitable brilliancy of the spirit, the immortality and holiness of being.”

“But these women, who don’t comprehend the symbolism of Scripture, grasp, in openmouthed wonder, for jewels, saying, ‘Why may I not use what God has exhibited?’ and, ‘I own it, why may I not enjoy it?’ and., ‘For whom were these things made, then, if not for us?’ Such are the utterances of those who are totally ignorant of the will of God. First necessities, such as water and air, He supplies free to all; and what is not necessary He has hid in the earth and water. Ants dig, griffins⁴⁶ guard gold, and the sea hides the pearls. But you busy yourselves about what you don’t need. Behold, the whole heaven is lighted up,

⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, II, 13.

⁴⁵ That is, if the Kingdom of heaven, proclaimed by the Word of God, is the one pearl of great price, then the preaching of the Apostles can be thought of as a pearl also.

⁴⁶ A griffin was a fierce, but legendary, creature that was half eagle and half lion.

and you don't seek God; but you seek gold, which is hidden, and death row inmates⁴⁷ dig up jewels.”

“You also oppose Scripture, ‘Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). But if all things have been conferred on you, and all things have been allowed to you, yet ‘if all things are lawful, all things are not helpful’” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

“All things are common, and it is not appropriate for the rich to command an undue share. That expression, ‘I possess, and possess in abundance: why then should I not enjoy what I have?’ is suitable neither to the man, nor to society. But more worthy of love is this: ‘I have; why should I not give to those who need?’ One who fulfills the command, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18), enjoys true luxury and treasured wealth. But that which is squandered on foolish lusts is waste, not expenditure. For God has given to us the liberty of use, but only so far as necessary; and He has determined that the use should be common. And it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want. How much more glorious is it to do good to many, than to live sumptuously! How much wiser is it to spend money on human beings, than on jewels and gold! How much more useful is it to acquire good friends, than lifeless ornaments!”

To further define the problem of riches, Jesus gave an illustration of camels and needles that has been little understood in our generation. The main gates of most cities in ancient times were huge wooden structures set in an archway and often overlaid with brass for strength and flameproofing. At night, the gates were closed and locked with a bar on the inside and not opened until morning. Travelers that arrived late in the day after the gates were closed were forced to spend the night outside the city unless there was some provision for them to get into the city. Outside the city, law and order did not exist at night and travelers were at the mercy of outlaws. This is still the case today in some third world countries.

To deal with this situation, many ancient cities had a “needle’s eye gate” which was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed⁴⁸ on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus. A man could fit easily through the “needle’s eye gate”, but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel’s pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the “needle’s eye gate.”

The statement Jesus made, that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle’s eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, made use of this imagery. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The Parable of the Sower refers to this pack as “the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things” (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas (one of the Seventy), sold a large amount of property, and brought the entire amount of the sale to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37).

⁴⁷ This is a reference to the common practice of using condemned prisoners to work the mines. If the mine caved in and killed some of the workers, it was no big deal since they would have been executed anyway.

⁴⁸ G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, pp. 24-25.

Ananias and Sapphria on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

This does not mean that no Christian can be rich. The Patriarch Job was very wealthy (Job 1:1-3, 42:12-17), yet the Lord referred to him as a blameless and upright man who had no peers in his righteousness (Job 1:8, 2:3). In Jesus' illustration, nothing is said about the camel's pack being loaded back up once the camel is inside. The key here is discerning the deceitfulness of wealth and the strength of its pull on one's heart. Job was able to let his pack be taken off without remorse. "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21; also Job 2:9-10). Many Christians throughout the ages have been unable or unwilling to continue fighting this pull and have taken oaths of poverty to thrust a sword (so to speak) into the heart of the demon of wealth.

How Are Things Added to Us in This World?

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33). How are material things added, and what are the things that are added?

John Chrysostom summarized⁴⁹ what is added by comparing it to the "hundredfold", that Jesus spoke of. In other words, the result is the camel's pack that was put back on once the camel got inside the city.

"Jesus did not limit rewards to things present, but joined with these the other sort of gifts also. For neither in speaking of any spiritual thing does He exclude such as are in the present life; nor again in promising such as are in our life, does He limit his promise to that kind. For He said, 'Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you' (Matthew 6:33). And again, 'Whoever has left houses or brethren, shall receive a hundredfold in this world, and in the future shall inherit everlasting life'" (Matthew 19:29).

Cyprian of Carthage stated⁵⁰ that the Lord has promised that the righteous will not go hungry, even in this life.

"Daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man, since it is written, 'The Lord will not slay the soul of the righteous by hunger' (Ezekiel 13:19 LXX); and again 'I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread' (Psalm 37:25). And the Lord moreover promises and says, 'Do not worry, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or how shall we be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. And your Father knows that you have need of all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you' (Matthew 6:33). To those who seek God's kingdom and righteousness, He promises that all things shall be added. For since all things are God's, nothing will be lacking to him who possesses God, if God Himself is not lacking to him. Thus a meal was divinely provided for Daniel. When he was shut up by the king's command in the den of lions; in the midst of wild beasts who

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 5.

⁵⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatise on the Lord's Prayer, IV, 21.

were hungry, the man of God was fed⁵¹. Thus Elijah in his flight was nourished (1 Kings 17:1-6) by ravens serving to him in his solitude.”

In addressing the faith of the Centurion in Capernaum, Jesus also noted his humility. John Chrysostom stated⁵² that his first priority was the Kingdom of God; as a result health was added to him. On this occasion, Jesus began to point out that the Jews were going to be replaced by the Gentiles in the Kingdom of God.

“Having such great faith, the centurion still accounted himself to be unworthy. Christ however, signifying that he was worthy to have Him enter his house, did much greater things, marveling at him, and giving more than he had asked. For he came seeking health of body for his servant, but went away, having received a kingdom. Do you see how the saying had been already fulfilled, ‘Seek the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added to you?’ (Matthew 6:33) Because he exhibited great faith, and lowliness of mind, He both gave him heaven, and added health to him”.

“And not by this alone did He honor him, but also by signifying who will be cast out so that he may be brought in. From this time on, He proceeds to make known to all, that salvation is by faith, not by works of the Law. And this is why not to Jews only, but to Gentiles also the gift shall be offered. Do not think that it has come to pass for the Centurion alone; so it shall be for the whole world’ (Matthew 8:11-12). And this He said, prophesying of the Gentiles, and suggesting good hope to them. For in fact there were some following Him from Galilee of the Gentiles. And this He said, on the one hand, not letting the Gentiles despair, on the other, putting down the proud spirits of the Jews. But that His saying might not offend the hearers, nor afford them any handle against Him, He doesn’t bring forward prominently what He has to say of the Gentiles. On the occasion of the centurion, He does not use the term ‘Gentiles’ openly; He does not say, ‘many of the Gentiles’, but, ‘many from East and West’. This was the language of one pointing out the Gentiles, but did not so much offend the hearers, because His meaning⁵³ was under a shadow”.

John Chrysostom gave⁵⁴ examples of Abel, Enoch and Noah, who sought the Kingdom of God and had something added to them in this life. We cannot partake of complete ease while we are engaged in combat. But some things are given to us in order that we don’t faint from the task ahead.

“The statement, ‘not having obtained the promises’ (Hebrews 11:39-40), is true. But of what kind of ‘promises’ is he speaking? Isaac and Jacob received the promises of the land; but Noah, Abel and Enoch, what kind of promises did they receive? Abel was admired, Enoch was translated, and Noah was preserved; but these things came to them for their virtue’s sake, and were a foretaste of things to come. From the beginning, God knew that the human race needed much condescension, and He gives us not only the things in the world to come, but also

⁵¹ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon, 1:29-40, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 01961.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVI, 5.

⁵³ Jews were scattered throughout the world from East to West; thus Jesus’ meaning did not immediately offend the Jews, because it wasn’t clear to them that He was referring to the Gentiles.

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXIII, 3.

those here. For instance, Christ said to His disciples, ‘Whoever has left houses, brethren, sisters, father, or mother, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life’ (Matthew 19:29). And again, ‘Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). Do you see that these things are given by Him in the way of addition, that we might not faint? For athletes have the benefit of careful attention, when engaged in combat, but do not then enjoy ease, living under rules; yet afterwards they enjoy complete ease. So God also does not grant us here to partake of complete ease. But even here He does give some benefits”.

This does not mean that everything is always peaceful and plentiful. The Patriarch Job had a very simple trust in the Lord’s provision, yet he lost everything (wealth, family, even health) in a matter of hours (Job 1:12-19; 2:7-8). Yet, the first thing he did when disaster struck (Job 1:20-22) was to shave his head and worship God. [In the ancient Middle East, men shaved their heads and let their beards grow. In our culture, men shave their face and let the hair on their head grow. Job’s action, in shaving his head, is equivalent to us getting cleaned up to go to Church]. In doing so, Job humbled himself before God. And in his misery, he sat in the ashes without complaining (Job 2:8-9). This is a very good example of a simple trust in God in the face of adversity. Job’s riches were not a joy to him when he had it: “If I had gloated because my wealth was great, this would be an iniquity deserving of judgment, for I would have denied God above” (Job 32:25, 28). Neither did Job grieve when his wealth was gone (Job 1:21).

Concentrating on Worldly Things Causes Us to Lose Focus

Chrysostom summarized⁵⁵ the power of wealth by pointing out that it has a twofold pull on us:

“Wealth hurts you not only in that it arms robbers against you (Matthew 6:19-20), and in that it darkens your mind in the most intense degree (Matthew 6:23), but also in that it casts you out of God’s service, making you captive of lifeless riches. Both ways do you harm: on the one hand, by causing you to be slaves of what you ought to command; on the other, by casting you out of God’s service, whom above all things, it is indispensable for you to serve”.

Chrysostom continues⁵⁶ by posing a question: What good does it do me to hear all this if I am still possessed by the desire for riches? First, there is power in continually hearing what the Lord says on this matter. Second, consider what kind of desire this really is: to be in grievous bondage and subject to tyranny, to be bound on all sides, to dwell in darkness, to be full of turmoil, to endure work without profit, and to keep your wealth for others and often for your enemies. What kind of desire is this? This is like piling up treasure in the midst of thieves. Isn’t this a situation worth escaping from? Yet people don’t want to escape.

“On the other hand, piling up treasure in heaven, we do not only bury our gold, but plant it. For the same is both treasure and seed; or rather it is more than either of these. For seed does not remain forever; but this abides perpetually. Again, the treasure does not germinate, but this bears you fruits which never die”.

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXI, 1.

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XX, 5.

Chrysostom pointed out⁵⁷ that people recognize that earthly trades need careful attention to detail to be mastered properly. But the same people do not necessarily feel that spiritual things need much attention. It's like we feel that we need to seek out earthly things and that the spiritual things will be added to us, rather than vice versa.

“If anyone wished to learn military affairs, of necessity he must learn the military laws. And if anyone sought to learn navigation or carpentry or anything else, of necessity he must learn the principles of the art. But in spiritual things, many people will not do anything of the kind, although this is a science, which needs much wakeful attention. For that it too is an art, which needs teaching, hear the prophet saying, ‘Come, children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord’ (Psalm 34:11). It follows therefore certainly that the fear of God needs teaching. Then he says, ‘What man is he that desires life?’ (Psalm 34:12) He means the life above; and again, ‘Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile; depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it’” (Psalm 34:13, 14).

“Do you know who said these things, a prophet, a historian, an apostle, or an evangelist? I will repeat the same statement expressed in other words. ‘Wash and make yourself clean; put away your wickedness from your souls before Mine eyes; learn to do well; seek out judgment. Keep your tongue from evil, and do good; learn to do well’ (Isaiah 1:16, 17). Do you see that virtue needs to be taught? For this one says, ‘I will teach you the fear of the Lord’, and the other, ‘Learn to do well’”.

“If your zeal is spent on things of this life, no account is made for spiritual things. Therefore not even earthly matters turn out according to your wishes, but there also are many difficulties. For Christ says, ‘Seek the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). These things, He said, shall be given in the way of addition. But we have inverted the order and seek the earth and the good things which are in the earth, as if those other heavenly things were to be given to us in addition. Therefore we have neither the one nor the other. Let us then wake up and become coveters of the things, which shall be hereafter; for so these also will follow. For he who seeks the things that relate to God, will also attain human blessings.”

Chrysostom also stated⁵⁸ that being riveted to the decaying things of this life is not nearly as pleasant as the life of monks, even though many people perceive the opposite to be the case.

“Nothing so urges men headlong and drives them down precipices, nothing so makes them fail of the things to come, as their being riveted to these decaying things. Nothing so surely makes them enjoy both the one and the other, as their regarding the things to come above everything. ‘Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). Even if the two were not joined, not even in that case ought we to aim at the things of this world. But now in obtaining the heavenly things, we may obtain both; however, some are not so persuaded, but are like senseless stones, and pursue shadows of pleasure. For what is pleasant of the things in this present life? I speak to you today that you may learn that the life of the monks and of them that are crucified to the

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, VIII, 10.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 3.

things of this life, which seems to you to be a wearisome life, is far sweeter, and more to be desired than that which seems to be easy and more delicate.”

Chrysostom also spoke⁵⁹ about the paradoxes of God. If we would like to be truly rich, become poor and leave the state of our wealth to God. This frees us from the slavery of wealth, which are mere trifles compared to eternity. Wealth is not a possession, but a loan, and the tenant of a house is more owner than the landlord. The rich and powerful may try to lord it over their subjects, but it is like children playing “king”. Everything will be overturned someday.

“Consider that the things that you have are but additions, where the principal sum is stored up for the life to come. Despise riches, if you would have riches. If you would be truly rich, become poor. For such are the paradoxes of God. He does not want you to be rich from your own care, but from His grace. Leave these things to Me, He says; make spiritual things your concern, that you may know My power. Flee from that yoke of slavery, which riches impose. As long as you cleave to them, you are poor. When you despise them, you are doubly rich, in that such things shall flow in upon you from every side, and to need little, is to be rich indeed. The king, so long as he wants nothing, differs little from the poor man. For this is poverty: to stand in need of others; and by this argument the king is poor, in so far as he stands in need of his subjects. But he that is crucified to the world wants nothing; for his hands are sufficient for his subsistence, as Paul said, ‘These hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me’ (Acts 20:34). These are his words who says, ‘As having nothing, yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). This is he who was thought a god by the inhabitants of Lystra (Acts 14:11-13). If you would obtain worldly things, seek Heaven. If you would enjoy things here, despise Heaven. ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’, He said, ‘and all these things shall be added to you’” (Matthew 6:33).

“Why do you admire these trifles? Why long for things of no real worth? How long is one poor? How long is one a beggar? Raise your eyes to heaven, think of the riches there, and smile at the gold here. Think of how little use it is; that the enjoyment of it lasts but for the present life, and that compared with eternity, the present life is as a grain of sand, or as a drop of water to the boundless ocean. The wealth of this life is not a possession; it is not property; it is a loan for use. When you die, willingly or unwillingly, all that you have goes to others, and they again give it up to others. We are all travelers; and the tenant of the house is more truly the owner of it, for the owner dies, and the tenant lives and still enjoys the house. Only those things, which we have sent before us to the other world, are our own. Our goods here are not our own; we have only a life interest in them; or rather they may even fail us during our lives. Only the virtues of the soul are properly our own, such as almsgiving and charity. Worldly goods are called external things. But let us make them internal. We cannot take our wealth with us when we depart this life, but we can take our charities with us. Let us rather send them before us, that they may prepare for us a place in the eternal mansions” (Luke 16:9).

“Goods are named from use, not from lordship, and are not our own, and possessions are not a property but a loan. Think how many masters every estate

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XI, Moral.

has had, and how many it will have! This we should say to our houses and all our goods. Virtue alone is able to depart with us, and to accompany us to the world above. Let us then give up and extinguish that love of wealth, that we may kindle in us affection for heavenly things. Both of these two affections cannot possess one soul. For it is said, 'Either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other' (Matthew 6:24). Do you see a man with a long train of attendants, clearing a way along the streets, clothed in silken garments, riding aloft, and stiffening his neck? Don't be overawed, but smile. As we laugh when we see children playing kings, so laugh at his state, for it is no better than theirs, not even as pleasant, for there is not the same innocence and simplicity as with children, but it becomes ridiculous and contemptible."

Some times we tend to focus our attention on earthly riches to the exclusion of everything else. An illustration might put this in a better perspective. Suppose you were walking along the sidewalk in an unfamiliar neighborhood, and you saw a gold bar lying next to the sidewalk. This one was about 8 by 3 by 2 inches, weighed 400 Troy ounces, and was worth about \$¼ million according to 2006 gold prices. Would you pick it up and take it home, or would you leave it there? Most people could use an extra \$¼ million, and would probably take it home⁶⁰.

Suppose the next day you were walking along the same sidewalk and noticed a dog pile in exactly the same spot that the gold bar was located the day before. Would you pick it up and take it home, or would you leave it there? Most people would express some kind of disgust, and may complain against those who don't pick up after their pets; but few people would pick it up and take it home.

In perspective, the riches of Christ's grace that we will see at His return make the gold bar seem like the dog pile. If we can get an understanding of the implications of this, we will have a much different approach to life.

Chrysostom also encouraged⁶¹ his people to prepare for their own departure from this life so that they are not caught unprepared like the people of Sodom or the people of Noah's day.

"Do you not see any signs? Not seeing any signs is actually a very great sign. For neither in Noah's time did they see any forecast of that universal destruction, but in the midst of their playing, eating, marrying, doing all things, which they were used to do, they were overtaken by that fearful judgment. And those in Sodom in like manner, living in delight, and suspecting none of what befell them, were consumed by that lightning, which then came down upon them. Considering then all these things, let us prepare for our departure."

"For even if the day of the consummation never overtakes us, the end of each person is at the doors, whether he is old or young; and it is not possible for men after they have departed, either to buy oil any more, or to obtain pardon by prayers, though he has Abraham, Noah, Job, or Daniel entreating for us."

"While we have the opportunity, let us store up for ourselves beforehand much confidence, let us gather oil in abundance, let us move everything important

⁶⁰ It might be wise to inquire who might have lost it, in case some mafia don might want it back!

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XX, 6.

into Heaven, that in the fitting time, and when we most need them, we may enjoy them.”

Loving Oneself Rather Than God

In seeking the Kingdom of God first, it is possible to appear to be doing so to men, but in fact to be acting out of our own self interest. In the 1st Century, the Twelve and the Seventy set an example of fasting and prayer and lived the rest of their lives as celibate, even those who were married. They lived with their wives as brother and sister rather than as husband and wife, because they had left behind the things of this world, which included the pleasures of this world. Some of the 1st Century heretics imitated this life style out of self-interest because it made them appear to men to more holy and dedicated to God. One example of this was Nicolas of Antioch (Acts 6:5), who was strongly condemned by the Apostle John for his approval of unrighteous behavior (Revelation 2:6, 15). The key in seeking the Kingdom of God is in keeping the Lord's commandments also.

Clement of Alexandria spoke⁶² about Christians who may go through the motions and appear to love the Lord, but who are in actuality unfaithful to Him. It is possible for these people to die for their neighbor out of love, but they are really doing it for their own sake. The real key is do they do what He wishes and do they keep His commandments.

“He who has shown himself unfaithful, and revolted to the devil's army, is cheated of his own hope; he doesn't believe what God has commanded. In denying the Lord, he also denies himself. He does not rob his Master of His authority by revolting against Him, but by denying the Savior, he denies life; for 'the light was life' (John 1:4). He does not term such men of little faith, but faithless and hypocrites (Matthew 23:13-29), who have His Name inscribed on them, but deny that they are really believers. But the faithful are called both servant and friend. So that if one loves himself, he loves the Lord, and confesses to salvation that he may save his soul.”

“It is possible to die for your neighbor out of love, regarding Christ as our neighbor, and yet suffer for your own sake rather than your neighbor. Jesus said, 'Why do you call me Lord, and not do the things which I say?' (Luke 6:46) For 'the people that loves with their lips, but have their heart far away from the Lord' (Isaiah 29:13), is another people, trust in another, and have willingly sold themselves to another. But those who perform the commandments of the Lord, in every action 'testify', by doing what He wishes, and consistently naming the Lord's Name. They 'testify' by deed to Him in whom they trust, that they are those 'who have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit' (Galatians 5:24-25). 'He that sows to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting'” (Galatians 6:8).

Gregory the Great encouraged⁶³ his people not just to give alms, which are a good thing, to offset their sins, but also to guard that they don't think that the grace of God is for sale through the donation of money.

“Those who already distribute compassionately what they possess are to be encouraged also that they study to keep careful guard. When they redeem by alms the sins they have committed, they may commit others, which will still

⁶² Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 7.

⁶³ Gregory the Great, The Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 20.

require redemption. They may suppose that the righteousness of God is for sale, thinking that if they take care to give money for their sins, they can sin with impunity. For the soul is more than food, and the body is more than clothing (Matthew 6:25; Luke 12:23). He who gives food or clothing to the poor, and yet is polluted by iniquity of soul or body, has offered the lesser thing to righteousness, and the greater thing to sin; for he has given his possessions to God, and himself to the devil.”

The Subtle Impact of Mammon on Our Lives

The impact of mammon all around us can creep up on us unexpectedly and without our being aware. We end up thinking that we can help a brother by helping him conceal his sin rather than confessing it. Our focus drifts more to increasing our wealth and that of our family than to obtaining forgiveness for our sins.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁴ that we need to take responsibility for the subtle encroachment of mammon in our lives and in the lives of those around us. The Prophets and the Apostles continually remind us that we cannot serve God and mammon. Yet we seem to care more for the things that belong to our wives and children than to their person and their salvation. It is like having a wild bear (the passions) loose in our neighborhood, but taking no precautions to avoid being mauled. Zoos take precautions to keep wild animals caged up, while we do not seem concerned that wild animals are loose in the King’s palace, which is our body.

“If you had a brother after the flesh, and if he should perpetrate ten thousand evil deeds, if you labor to conceal his deeds, you yourself will partake of the shame when he is disgraced. But regarding your spiritual brother, when you try to conceal his sin, you don’t free him from charges, you rather add to him ten thousand charges against him from un-confessed sin.”

“‘Why he is worthless and incorrigible’, you may say. Then for this reason become his friend, that you may put an end to his being such a one, that you may convert him, that you may lead him back to virtue. ‘But he doesn’t obey’, you will say, ‘neither does he follow advice’. How do you know? Have you admonished him, and attempted to amend him? ‘I have admonished him often’, you will say, ‘both once, and a second time’”.

“Is this often? If you had done this all the time, should you grow weary, and give it up? Do you notice how God is always admonishing us, by the prophets, by the Apostles, by the Evangelists? Have we performed everything, and have we been obedient in all things? By no means! Did He then cease admonishing? Does He not say each day, ‘You cannot serve God, and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24), and with many, the tyranny of wealth yet increases? Does He not cry aloud each day, ‘Forgive, and you shall have forgiveness’ (Luke 6:37), and we become wild beasts more and more? Does He not continually admonish us to restrain desire, and to keep the mastery over wicked lust, and many wallow worse than swine in this sin? But nevertheless, He does not cease speaking.”

“We should not blame others for these things, when we don’t even take account of those closest to us: wife, children, and servants. We care more that our servants may be more in number, that our children may receive a large inheritance

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LIX, 6

from us, and that our wife may have gold ornaments, fine clothing, and wealth. We don't care at all for them, but for the things that belong to them. This is like seeing a house in a bad state, and the walls giving way; and then to neglect raising the walls, but instead make great fences around it. This is also like seeing a body diseased; instead of taking care of this, we weave gilded clothing for it. This is also like having a wife that was sick; we pay attention to the servants, and the looms, and the vessels in the house, and take care of other things, leaving her to lie and moan."

"This is being done right now, while our soul is in an evil and wretched state, angry, reviling, lusting wrongly, and full of vainglory. We are dragged down to the earth, and torn by many wild beasts; we neglect to drive away the passions, but we are careful about house and servants. If a bear had escaped from the zoo, we would shut up our houses, and travel in such a way so as not to encounter the wild beast. Now not one wild beast, but many such thoughts are tearing our soul in pieces; we don't even notice it. In the city we take great care to shut up the wild beasts in cages, not at the senate house, not at the courts of justice, not at the king's palace, but far off somewhere at a distance, where we keep them chained. But in the case of the soul, where the senate house is, where the King's palace is, where the court of justice is, the wild beasts are let loose, making a commotion in the mind and the royal throne. Disturbance is everywhere; we are like a city thrown into confusion from being overrun by barbarians. What takes place in us is as though a snake were sitting on a brood of sparrows, and the sparrows, with their feeble cries, were flying about frightened, without having any place to go and end their fears."

Chrysostom went on⁶⁵ about how we should treat our spouses, our children and our servants or employees. With our wives, we should banish the notion of yours, and mine since our spouse even has power over our bodies. Honoring and preferring our spouses before all others will influence everyone around us by our love. This is one way that we can seek the incorruptible things of the Kingdom of God, and other things of this life will be added to us.

"Teach your wife these lessons, but be very gracious. Above all banish this notion from her soul, of 'mine and yours'. If she says the word 'mine', say to her, 'What things do you call yours?' I have nothing of mine own. How then do you speak of mine, when all things are yours?' Freely grant her the word to speak. This is not the expression of flattery, but of exceeding wisdom. Thus will you be able to restrain her wrath, and put an end to her disappointment. For it is flattery when a man does an unworthy act with an evil intent. Say then, 'Even I am yours'; this advice Paul gives where he says, 'The husband has not power over his own body, but the wife' (1 Corinthians 7:4). If I have no power over my body, but you have, much more have you over my possessions. By saying these things you will have quieted her, you will have quenched the fire, you will have shamed the devil, you will have made her more your slave than one bought with money. Thus, by your own language, teach her never to speak of 'mine and yours'".

"Never call her simply by her name, but with terms of endearment, with honor, with much love. Honor her, and she will not need honor from others; she

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XX.

will not want the glory that comes from others, if she enjoys that which comes from you. Prefer her before everyone, on every account, both for her beauty and her discernment, and praise her. You will thus persuade her to listen to no one else, but to scorn the entire world except yourself. Teach her the fear of God, and all good things will flow from this as from a fountain, and the house will be full of ten thousand blessings. If we seek the things that are incorruptible, these corruptible things will follow. 'For', He said, 'seek first His kingdom, and all these things shall be added to you' (Matthew 6:33). What sort of persons must the children of such parents be like? What will the servants of such masters be like? What will all others who come near them be like? Will not they too eventually be loaded with blessings without number? For generally, servants have their character formed by imitating their master; they love the same objects, which they have been taught to love, speak the same language, and engage with them in the same pursuits. If thus we regulate ourselves, and attentively study the Scriptures, in most things we shall derive instruction from them. And thus we shall be able to please God, and to pass through the whole of this present life virtuously, and to attain those blessings which are promised to those that love Him."

Appendix The Indian Gold-Digging "Ants"

Lions called ants

The fantastic story of the gold digging "ant-lions" of India has a long and complicated history. The source might be the great Hindu (Sanskrit) epic, the *Mahabharata* (with origins around 1000 B.C.E.), which makes reference to ants that excavated gold (Kevan 1992). The earliest surviving European account of gold ants or ant lions as they were called much later is found in the *Historiês Apódexis* of Hêródotos (ca. 430 B.C.E.). Druce (1923) retells the story of these unusually large and vicious "ants":

[The] scene is laid in a northern district of India, where there is a desert in which ants abound in size somewhat less than dogs but larger than foxes. They burrow under ground and heap up the sand, which contains gold. The Indians go to the desert to collect this sand, each man provided with three camels harnessed together side by side; that is, on either side a male, and in the middle a female on which he rides. The female must only just have been parted from her recently born young. The Indians being thus equipped set out at such a time that they will arrive at the hottest hour of the day, for during the greatest heat the ants hide underground. They bring with them sacks, which they fill with the sand and then return as fast as they can. For the ants detect them by the smell and pursue them, so that if the Indians do not get a good start while the ants are assembling, not a man could be saved. The male camels in time slacken their pace, but the females mindful of their young hasten on; and in this way the Indians return safely with their gold (pp. 354-355).

This story of giant ants that dig up and fiercely protect their gold passed through various hands, including those of Nearchus (4th century B.C.E.) and Megasthenes (3rd century B.C.E.). Nearchus is quoted as having "seen the skins of ants which dig up gold, as large as the skins of leopards" (Druce 1923, p. 355). According to Druce (1923) the term "ant-lion" appears around the 2nd century B.C.E. In his description of the lions of Arabia, Agatharchides "actually mentions ant-lions by their Greek name and says that in appearance most of them differ in no way from the other lions; and Strabo when describing the coasts adjacent to the Arabian Gulf says that the country abounds with elephants and lions called ants" (pp. 355-356).

Mystery Solved?

Controversy over the real identity of the Indian gold-digging ants (or ant-lions) has continued until the present. Scholars have suggested a variety of animals including dogs, marmots, pangolins, mongooses, and the badger-like ratel (Kevan 1992).

In a 1996 *New York Times* article, Marlise Simons reports the mystery may now be solved. In one of the most inaccessible regions of the Himalayas along the upper Indus River, French ethnologist Michel Peissel and other explorers say they found marmots throwing up gold-bearing soil from deep underground as they dig their burrows. Moreover, the indigenous Minaro people living there say that for generations they have collected gold dust from the marmots' work. So why did Herodotus and other ancient writers describe the furry marmots as ants? Peissel's favored explanation is that confusion set in because in Persian the word for marmot is equivalent to "mountain ant." In addition, marmots are unusually large in the Himalayas, with bushy fur and a large fox-like tail. They have razor-sharp teeth and claws. "They can be ferocious if one tampers with their burrows, which is just what the gold-seekers did," Peissel says (Simons 1996).

While this discovery may explain the centuries-old mystery, Peissel would like to test his findings with a full archeological and geological survey. The area lies on the tense border between Pakistan and India, however, so the political climate may prevent such work. Says Peissel: "It's right in the line of fire of both sides. There was gunfire when we were there. The locals tell us that the marmots are dwindling. The Indian soldiers are constantly taking potshots at them" (Simons 1996).

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For more information, see <http://www.antlionpit.com/golddigging.html>.

JUSTIFICATION AND FAITH

July 3, 2011
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

EPISTLE LESSON – Romans 5:1-11

In today’s Epistle lesson, we encounter the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation: *Justification by Faith*. The word justified is a translation of the Hebrew “*tsadaq*” and the Greek “*dikaioo*” and means to render just, innocent or right. This Old Testament concept of being justified is used today in various Orthodox services. For example: **(Psalm 51:4)** “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight; so that Thou art justified (*tsadaq*) when Thou doest speak and blameless (i.e. clean) when Thou dost judge.” **(Psalm 143:2)** “And do not enter into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight no man living is justified’ (*tsadaq*). Yet a time will come when **(Isaiah 45:25)** “In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified...” (*tsadaq*).

The term “faith,” however, has come to mean something a little different than it did in the Old Testament and in the First Century. And this is reflected in the English translations of the Bible today. Listed below are some of the Greek words translated “faith” and their related words:

GREEK WORD	DEFINITION	STRONG’S REF.#
Peitho	To convince, to rely upon	3982
Pistis	from peitho: persuasion, credence	4102
Pistos	from peitho: trustworthy	4103
Pisteuo	from pistis: to have faith	4100
Pistikos	from pistis: genuine, trustworthy	4101
Pistoo	from pistos: to assure	4104

These words are translated into English at various places, *to have faith, to believe, to trust*. But the root word of them all is “*peitho*” which implies faith, believe and trust based upon being convinced. For example, even the demons have faith – and tremble (James 2:19). They have been thoroughly convinced long ago.

If one were to flip through English language Bibles, one would find that the English word faith is used much more often in the New Testament than trust. Whereas in the Old Testament, the opposite is true. Listed below are some of the Hebrew words that are commonly translated faith, belief, trust:

HEBREW WORD	DEFINITION	STRONG'S REF.#
Aman	to build up, support, trust	539
Emuwn	from aman: established, trusty	529
Emunah	from emuwn: firmness, security	530
Chacah	to flee suddenly for protection	2620
Machaceh	from chacah: a shelter	4268
Batach	to hurry for refuge	982
Mibtach	from batach: a refuge, security, assurance	4009

The first three of the above words are commonly translated “to believe” and “to have faith;” the last four are translated “to trust.”

Thus, in both New and Old Testaments, the concepts of “faith,” “belief” and “trust” are interwoven and have their root meaning in trust and security based upon something convincing or established. In the Old Testament, the concept of trust goes further and includes words related to shelter, protection and refuge.

In both Old and New Testament times, the people of God have had a covenant relationship with their Lord. For example, the Lord said, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own special treasure among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5). Following this, the Lord went on to detail the Ten Commandments which can be summarized as “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

A similar covenant exists in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:8-13) and the same basic commandments apply: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). The difference now is that the Mediator of the covenant has come and died (Hebrews 9:15), meaning we are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9), and He has left the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; Romans 5:5). The cup of the Lord’s Supper is called “The New Covenant in My Blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25, Luke 22:20). He has also put His Laws into our minds and written them on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10). Because of this covenant relationship, trust, shelter, protection and refuge exists – which brings us back to the Gospel illustration of the birds and the flowers.

This covenant relationship is so strong that tribulation just generates additional strength. From Romans 5:3, translating literally from the Greek, “tribulation (in the sense of pressure) works cheerful endurance, cheerful endurance works proof and proof works a confident expectation (or hope).” From the Greek word study on faith, faith has its root in being convinced and implies trust. And it is tribulation (i.e. the pressure of daily life) that generates the proof and the convincing that the Lord is good and that He can be trusted. This is why we glory in our tribulations (Romans 5:3), because it deepens our trust and increases our faith.

Therefore, faith, belief, trust becomes a real world, tangible experience. And justification by faith becomes a covenant relationship and not just a theological abstraction. Next week's Gospel lesson of the Centurion serves as a good example of this faith, belief, trust.

To put the faith, belief, trust Paul is speaking of in context; the phrase "justified by faith" (v.1) comes as a summary of Romans chapter 4. There faith is described as follows:

- Belief is accounted for righteousness. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (vv.3, 5).
- Works (or earning one's way) generates further debt, not grace (v.4).
- Paul quotes David as describing "the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works" (vv.6-8, Psalm 32:1-2).
- This blessedness came to Abraham before his circumcision: therefore it applies to Jews and Gentiles alike (vv.9-12).
- The promises made to Abraham also apply to those who are of the faith of Abraham (vv.13-16).

John Chrysostom stated, "Consider how he (Paul) everywhere sets down these two points: His part and our part. On His part, however, there are things varied and numerous and diverse. For He died for us, and further reconciled us, and brought us to Himself, and gave us grace unspeakable. But we brought faith only as our contribution. And so he says 'through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand' (v.2). This grace is the being counted worthy of the knowledge of God, the being forced from error, the coming to a knowledge of the Truth, the obtaining of all the blessings that come through Baptism. For the end of His bringing us near was that we might receive these gifts. For it was not only that we might have simple remission of sins, that we were reconciled; but that we might receive also countless benefits."

Chrysostom gave an example, "A person has acquired rule and glory and authority, yet he does not stand therein continuously, but is speedily cast out of it. Or if a man does not take it from him, death comes and is sure to take it from him. But God's gifts are not of this kind; for neither man, nor occasion, nor crisis of affairs, nor even the devil, nor death can come and cast us out of them. But when we are dead we then more strictly speaking have possession of them, and keep going on enjoying more and more. And if you feel in doubt about those to come; from those now present and what you have already received, believe in the other also. For this is why he (Paul) says 'And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (v.2) that you may learn what kind of soul the faithful ought to have" (Homily ix on Romans 5).

In many places affected by the Protestant Reformation, "faith" and "works" were often discussed as separate and exclusive. In Orthodox tradition "faith" and "works" are seen as two sides of the same coin. For more discussion on this, see the Epistle lesson for the 21st Sunday after Pentecost and the Gospel lesson for Meatfare Sunday in Lent.