

GREAT FAITH
Healing the Centurion’s Slave
Slavery and Death
The Presentation of Mary

July 2, 2023
4th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

GOSPEL: Matthew 8:5-13
EPISTLE: Romans 6:18-23

Both the Gospel and Epistle lessons used to be used in some Western churches, but are currently falling into disuse. In fact, personal or political freedom is often replacing the words of the Epistle “slaves to righteousness” and “slaves to God” as the basic tenets of Christianity. To the Apostle Paul, slavery was not that big a deal, and one could be a Christian just as easily while a slave as if he were freed (1 Corinthians 7:21-24).

Table of Contents

Background: Old Testament Slavery	613
Gospel: Matthew 8:5-13 (Luke 7:1-10).....	614
What is Great Faith?	616
Humility in Our Requests for Grace	621
Delegation of Authority	622
Sitting Down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob	625
The Outer Darkness	627
Epistle: Romans 6:18-23	630
Slaves of Righteousness.....	631
Struggling Against Sin.....	635
Sin Leading to Death	637
Mary’s Parents.....	706
The Conception of Mary.....	706
The Birth of Mary.....	707
The Entry of Mary into the Temple.....	708
Growing up in the Temple.....	709
Parables from the Old Testament	711
Epistle: Hebrews 9:1-7	713
On Mary’s Preparation	715
Matins Gospel: Luke 1:39-49, 56	718
Gospel: Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28.....	719

Background: Old Testament Slavery

Slavery existed prior to the Mosaic Law and a number of Mosaic Law regulations existed to control its abuses. It was traditional for a conquering nation to lead the strongest and loveliest captives back to its homeland as slaves. This made slavery different than what existed in the United States; that is, it meant that people of any race could be slaves, not just African-Americans. Different nations had different laws regarding slaves, but in most cases, the slave was simply the property of his master and could be dealt with as he pleased.

Things were different in Israel, however; Mosaic Law required slaves to be treated humanely. Yet there were justifiable reasons why someone could be sold as a slave. Mosaic Law for Hebrew slaves can be summarized as follows:

- One could become a slave due to
 - Poverty, as in squandering one's assets (Leviticus 25:39)
 - Theft, as being unable to make fourfold restitution (Exodus 22:1-3)
- The duration of one's slavery was six years; the slave was to be freed in the seventh (Exodus 21:2, Deuteronomy 15:12, 18)
 - When freed, the slave was not to be sent off empty-handed (Deuteronomy 15:12, 13)
 - The slave-owner was required to give the slave liberally from his livestock, grain and wine (Deuteronomy 15:14, 15)
 - Violations of this six-year sunset clause on slavery was one of the reasons for the Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 34:8-22)
- At any time during the six years, either the slave could redeem himself, or a relative could redeem him (Leviticus 25:47-49)
- When a man was sold into slavery, his family went also
 - A man's family was also freed with him in the seventh year (Exodus 21:2, 3)
 - If a slave-owner gave his slave a wife during the six years, she and her children were not freed on the seventh year unless redeemed (Exodus 21:4)
 - If a slave did not want to be freed in the seventh year, his ear was pierced to indicate lifelong slavery (Deuteronomy 15:16, 17, Exodus 21:5, 6)
 - Special rules existed regarding female slaves to insure that they were treated as daughters of the household to which they were attached (Exodus 21:7-11)
 - If a man struck and injured his slave (male or female), the slave was immediately freed, and not empty-handed (Exodus 21:26, 27)
 - On the other hand, anyone caught kidnapping people and selling them as slaves received the death penalty (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7)

Copyright © Mark Kern 2006

In the case of non-Hebrew slaves or Hebrew slaves of non-Hebrew masters, the law was a little different. From Hebrew tradition:

- For Hebrew slaves of non-Hebrew masters, the six-year sunset clause didn't apply
 - The slave was freed only by redemption (Leviticus 25:47-55, or the arrival of the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39-42)
- For non-Hebrew slaves, the six-year sunset clause didn't apply either
 - Non-Hebrews could be permanent slaves (Leviticus 25:45-46)
 - Freedom could be obtained by redemption, becoming heir to the household (e.g., childless masters), or by a written testament by the owner
 - The non-Hebrew slave was to be treated like a Hebrew, including circumcision, the Sabbath rest, and joining the various festivals¹.

Gospel: Matthew 8:5-13 (Luke 7:1-10)

In the 1st Century as in earlier times, people had both slaves and hired servants. Unfortunately, the Greek and Hebrew words for slave and servant are not translated into English

¹ See Genesis 17:12, Exodus 12:44, Deuteronomy 12:12, 18, Deuteronomy 16:11, Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14.

consistently in most translations. There are many words in Greek and Hebrew for different kinds of slaves and servants. The two used in the Gospel lesson are listed below, along with their definitions.

Greek Word	Definition	Strong's Ref #
doulos	a slave	1401
pais	a boy servant (as being spanked often)	3816

Today's Gospel lesson begins with a Centurion (i.e., a captain of 100 troops) sending a delegation to Jesus. Matthew's account leaves out some details that appear in Luke's account. From Luke's account, the Centurion did not come to Jesus himself but sent a delegation of the Jewish elders (Luke 7:3) to ask Jesus to heal his slave. The Jewish elders were very appreciative of the Centurion (a Gentile) since he loved Israel and built them a synagogue (Luke 7:4-5). This implies that the Centurion's slave (doulos in Luke 7:2, pais in Matthew 8:6) was probably a young Hebrew boy. Under Old Testament Law, then, this would be a case of a Hebrew slave and a non-Hebrew master. This young boy was dear to the Centurion (Luke 7:2) and was ill and near death (Luke 7:2) as well as being paralyzed and tormented (Matthew 8:6). Jesus agreed to come with the Jewish elders (Matthew 8:7, Luke 7:6).

Before Jesus reached the Centurion's house, the Centurion sent another delegation of his friends (not servants) to Jesus saying that he was not worthy for Jesus to come under his roof (Matthew 8:8, Luke 7:6). This was undoubtedly a reference to current practices of the Pharisees where they did not associate with or enter the houses of Gentiles lest they be defiled (John 19:28, Acts 10:28, 11:3). This defilement could occur if the Gentile had touched a dead body and then they touched him. The Centurion respected this and considered himself unclean in Jesus' eyes. In his own eyes, he was a slave, not a slave owner, and Jesus was his Master. Yet it is a significant statement about the Centurion that a delegation of Jews (and even Jewish elders!) would intercede for him with Jesus (Luke 7:4-5).

This condition of unworthiness is prevalent in the Orthodox liturgy today when it comes to receiving the things of God. For example, a pre-communion prayer attributed to John Chrysostom reads: "O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy nor sufficient that You should come under the roof of the house of my soul, for it is entirely desolate and fallen in ruin, and You have not in me a place worthy to lay Your head. But, as You did for our sake humble Yourself from on high, so do now stoop to the measure of my lowliness."

The Centurion also sent word via his friends to tell Jesus that he himself was not even worthy to meet Jesus face to face (Luke 7:7). However, he asked that Jesus just speak a word that his young slave might be healed (Matthew 8:8, Luke 7:7). In his humility, the Centurion recognized Jesus' authority over the infirmity, the paralysis and the demons involved in the tormenting (compare Job 2:2-9). He recognized that Jesus could just command that the healing be done just as he (the Centurion) commands his own troops and his own slaves. "I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go' and he goes; and to another, 'Come', and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this', and he does it" (Matthew 8:9, Luke 7:8).

Basil the Great stated² that it was the faith of the Centurion that healed his slave, and not the Presence of Christ.

“If anyone, for true pity’s sake, invites you with many pleas to enter his house, let him be told to follow the faith of the Centurion. When Jesus was hastening to him to perform an act of healing, he asked Jesus not to come in the words, ‘Lord I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but speak the word only and my slave shall be healed’ (Matthew 8:8). When Jesus said to him, ‘Go your way; as you have believed, so be it done to you’ (Matthew 8:13), his slave was healed from that hour. Learn then, brother, that it was the faith of the Centurion, not the presence of Christ, which delivered the sick man. So too now, if you pray, in whatever place you are, and the sick man believes that he will be aided by your prayers, all will fall out as he desires.”

Jesus’ response was one of marveling at the Centurion’s faith. This word faith (Greek: pistis) could also be translated belief and implies trust based upon being convinced. This is one of two recorded occasions where Jesus marveled. The other is at the unbelief (or unfaith or untrusting) of the people of His hometown, Nazareth (Mark 6:6). The unbelief was so strong in Nazareth that Jesus could do few miracles there (Mark 6:5). Performing miracles in the midst of great unbelief would result in blasphemy.

What is Great Faith?

A great faith may mean something to one person and something else to another. It is not necessarily just the exhibition of miracles, although that could be the case.

Jerome referred³ to a number of places in the Scriptures where the subject is great faith. Some may be obvious to us and some may not be. For himself, he did not place his own faith as anything great. He listed some observations and examples of great faith, such as the Centurion, the Apostles and the woman with the flow of blood.

1. When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8)
2. The faith in question is that of which the Lord Himself said, “Your faith has made you whole” (Matthew 9:22).
3. The faith of the Centurion, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Matthew 8:10).
4. The faith of the Apostles, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 8:26) They later acquired great faith, but their faith was small at this time.
5. As Christ said also, “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move to another place’, and it shall move” (Matthew 17:20).
6. The woman, who for twelve years was wasting away with a bloody flux. Her singleness of mind and her devotion to her God met with our Lord’s approval. “For she said within herself, “If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole” (Matthew 9:21).
7. Neither the Centurion nor that poor woman had believed in the mysteries of the Trinity, for this was revealed to the Apostles after the resurrection of Christ. The faith of such as believe in the mystery of the Trinity has its due preeminence.

² Basil the Great, Letter to His Disciple Chilo, XLII, 2.

³ Jerome, “The Dialogue Against the Luciferians” 15, Treatises.

8. This is the faith, which our Lord said was seldom found. This is the faith, which even in the case of those who believe rightly, is hard to find in perfection.
9. "According to your faith, be it done to you" (Matthew 9:29), says God. I do not like the sound of those words. For if it be done to me according to my faith, I shall perish. And yet I certainly believe in God the Father, I believe in God the Son, and I believe in God the Holy Spirit. I believe in one God; nevertheless, I would not have it done to me according to my faith.
10. The enemy often comes and sows tares in the Lord's harvest. I do not mean to imply that anything is greater than the purity of heart, which believes that mystery; but undoubted faith towards God it is hard indeed to find.

Jerome continued, "Let us suppose I stand to pray; I could not pray, if I did not believe. But if I really believed, I should cleanse that heart of mine, with which God is seen. I should beat my hands upon my chest; the tears would stream down my cheeks, my body would shudder, my face grow pale; I should lie at my Lord's feet, weep over them, and wipe them with my hair; I should cling to the cross and not let go my hold until I obtained mercy. But, as it is, frequently in my prayers, I am either walking in the arcades, or calculating my interest, or am carried away by base thoughts, so as to be occupied with things the mere mention of which makes me blush. Where is our faith? Are we to suppose this was how Jonah prayed, or the three youths in the furnace, Daniel in the lion's den, or the robber on the cross? I have given these illustrations that you may understand my meaning. Let everyone commune with his own heart, and he will find throughout the whole of life how rare a thing it is to find a soul so faithful that it does nothing through the love of glory, nothing on account of the petty gossip of men. For he who fasts does not as an immediate consequence think about fasting to God, nor he who holds out his hand to a poor man, think about lending to the Lord. Vice is next-door neighbor to virtue. It is hard to rest content with God alone for judge.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated⁴ that faith belongs to man along with free will. This means that most of the miracles that were done, occurred because the recipient had the faith to do it, like the Centurion. The converse applies to unbelievers.

"God preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying, 'According to your faith be it to you' (Matthew 9:29), thus showing that there is a faith especially belonging to man, since he has his own opinion. And again, 'All things are possible to him that believes' (Mark 9:23); and, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so be it done to you' (Matthew 8:13). Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith. For this reason, 'He that believes in Him has eternal life while he who does not believe in the Son does not have eternal life, but the wrath of God shall remain on him' (John 3:36). In the same manner the Lord, both showing His own goodness, and indicating that man has his own free will and his own power, said to Jerusalem, 'How often have I wished to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Therefore your house shall be left to you desolate.'"

"Those who maintain the opposite to these conclusions, present the Lord as destitute of power, as if He were unable to accomplish what He willed. These men cannot receive His immortality."

⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, xxxvii, 5-6.

John Cassian spoke⁵ of great faith as that kind of faith that has been tested, and he gave the examples of Job and Abraham. The Centurion was tested to see if he had the faith to trust Christ from a distance, or whether he needed Him to come to his house. Paul chided people to not be overwhelmed by minor testing, but to bear up as he and those with him were doing. There is the power of man's will to resist evil, and there is also the grace of God to help in moderating the violence of the testing. These must not be confused. God is teaching us to walk spiritually, just as a kind nurse teaches a toddler to walk physically.

“In the case of Job, we read that the Divine righteousness provided for His well-trying athlete, when the devil had challenged him to single combat. Job might have advanced against his foe, not with his own strength, but solely with the protection of God's grace. Supported only by Divine aid without any virtue of patience on his own part, he could have borne that weight of temptations and losses, and dealt with the cruelty of his foe. If he did, the devil would have repeated with some justice that slanderous speech, ‘Does Job serve God for nothing? Have You not surrounded him and all his possessions? But take away your hand’, i.e., allow him to fight with me in his own strength, ‘and he will curse You to Your face’ (Job 1:9-11). After the struggle the slanderous devil dared not vent any such murmur as this; he admitted that he was conquered by Job's strength and not by that of God. We must not say that the grace of God was completely lacking to him, which gave to the tempter a power of tempting in proportion to that which it knew that Job had of resisting. God did not protect Job from his attacks in such a way as to leave no room for human virtue, but only provided that the fierce foe should not overwhelm him when weakened, in an unfair contest.”

“That the Lord sometimes tends to test our faith that it may be made stronger and more glorious, we are taught by the example of the Centurion. In his case, the Lord knew that He would cure his slave by the power of His word, yet He chose to offer His bodily presence, saying, ‘I will come and heal him’ (Matthew 8:7). But the Centurion overcame this offer by a more fervent faith, ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof; speak the word only and my slave shall be healed’ (Matthew 8:8). The Lord marveled at him, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel’ (Matthew 8:10). There would have been no ground for praise or merit, if Christ had only preferred in him what He Himself had given.” The Centurion went over and above normal expectations.

“This searching trial of faith the Divine righteousness brought about also in the case of Abraham. ‘It came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham’ (Genesis 22:1). The Divine righteousness wished to test not that faith with which the Lord had inspired him, but that which, when called and enlightened by the Lord, he could show forth by his own free will. The firmness of his faith was proven; and when the grace of God, which had for a while left him to prove him came to his aid, it said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear the Lord, and for My sake have not spared your beloved son’” (Genesis 22:12).

“That this kind of testing can happen to us, for the sake of proving us, is clearly foretold by the giver of the Law. ‘If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder

⁵ John Cassian, 3rd Conference of Abbot Chaeremon, II, xiii, 14.

comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods”—which you have not known—“and let us serve them”, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul’ (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). What then follows? When God has permitted that prophet or dreamer to arise, will He protect those whose faith He is testing in such a way as to leave no place for their own free will, where they can fight with the tempter with their own strength? And why is it necessary for them even to be tried if He knows them to be so weak and feeble as not to be able by their own power to resist the tempter? But certainly the Divine righteousness would not have permitted them to be tempted, unless it knew that there was within them an equal power of resistance, by which they could, by an equitable judgment, be found either guilty or worthy of praise.”

“To the same effect Paul says, ‘Therefore let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation make also a way of escape that you may be able to bear it’ (1 Corinthians 10:12-13). When he says, ‘Let him that stands take heed lest he fall’, he sets free will on its guard, that after grace had been received, it could either stand by its own exertions or fall through carelessness. When he adds, ‘there has no temptation taken you but what is common to man’, he chides their weakness and the frailty of their heart that is not yet strengthened, since they could not yet resist the attacks of the hosts of spiritual wickedness, which he and those who were perfect fought daily. He also says, ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12). When he adds, ‘God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able’, he is hoping that the Lord will allow them to be tempted, but that they may not be tempted above what they are able to bear. The one shows the power of man’s will, the other denotes the grace of the Lord who moderates the violence of temptations. In all these phrases then there is proof that Divine grace always stirs up the will of man, not to protect and defend it in all things in such a way as to cause it to avoid fighting by its own efforts against its spiritual adversaries. The victor may ascribe it to God’s grace; the loser may ascribe it to his own weakness, and thus learn that his hope is always not in his own courage but in the Divine assistance, and that he must always fly to his Protector.”

“To prove that this is not our own conjecture, consider what we read in Joshua the son of Nun. ‘The Lord left these nations and would not destroy them, that by them He might try Israel, whether they would keep the commandments of the Lord their God, and that they might learn to fight with their enemies’ (Judges 2:22-3:1-2). We may illustrate the incomparable mercy of our Creator by something earthly, not as being equal in kindness, but as an illustration of mercy. Consider a tender and anxious nurse, who carries an infant on her bosom for a long time in order to teach it to walk. She first allows it to crawl, then supports it, that by the aid of her right hand it may lean on her for alternate steps. She may leave it for a little and if she sees it tottering at all, catches hold of it, and grabs it when

falling. When down, she picks it up, and either shields it from a fall, or allows it to fall lightly, and sets it up again after a tumble. When she has brought it up to boyhood or the strength of youth or early manhood, she lays upon it some burdens or labors by which it may be not overwhelmed but exercised, and allows it to vie with those of its own age. How much more does the heavenly Father of all know whom to carry in the bosom of His grace, and whom to train to virtue in His sight by the exercise of free will! Yet He helps him in his efforts, hears him when he calls, doesn't leave him when he seeks Him, and sometimes snatches him from peril even without his knowing it."

Humility in Our Requests for Grace

John Chrysostom cautioned⁶ us about beating our own drum, since this makes us odious to men and abominable to God. Jesus marveled at the Centurion because he was not like this; similarly Paul and John the Baptist. This is the first principle of practical wisdom; the humble man will not be vain or angry, but will drive out the diseases of the soul.

“Let us beware therefore of saying anything about ourselves, for this renders us both odious with men and abominable to God. For this reason, the greater the good works we do, the less let us say of ourselves; this being the way to reap the greatest glory both with men and with God; not only glory from God, but a reward, and a great recompense. Don’t demand a reward that you may receive a reward. Confess yourself to be saved by grace, that He may profess Himself a debtor to you; and not for your good works only, but also for such rightness of mind. When we do good works, we have Him debtor for our good works only; but when we do not so much as think we have done any good work, then this disposition is equivalent to our good works. Should this be absent, they won’t appear to be great. In the same way, when we have servants, be sure to most approve them when, after having performed all their service with good will, they do not think they have done anything great. If you want to make your good deeds great, do not think them to be great, and then they will be great.”

“It was in this way that the Centurion said, ‘I am not worthy that You should come under my roof’ (Matthew 8:8); because of this, he became worthy, and was ‘marveled at’ above all Jews. In the same vein Paul said, ‘I am not fit to be called an apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:9); because of this he became first of all. So likewise John, ‘I am not worthy to loose the sandal strap of His shoe’ (John 1:27); because of this he was the ‘friend of the Bridegroom’ (John 3:29). The hand which he claimed to be unworthy to touch His shoes, this did Christ draw onto His own head⁷. So Peter said, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man’ (Luke 5:8); because of this he became a foundation of the Church. For nothing is so acceptable to God as to number one’s self with the last. This is a first principle of all practical wisdom. For he that is humbled, will not be vainglorious, angry, envious of his neighbor, and will not harbor any other passion. If a man, by mourning for things pertaining to this life, drives out all the diseases of his soul, much more will he, who mourns for sins, enjoy the blessing of self-restraint.”

John Chrysostom contrasted⁸ the faith of the Centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) with that of the nobleman (John 4:46-53). Both had asked Jesus to come to his house to heal a slave or a child, but they exhibited much different faith, and different humility toward what Jesus could do. The Centurion, when Jesus was willing to go to his house, asked Him to just command from a distance, and expressed unworthiness. The nobleman, before Jesus offered, asked Him to come to his house “before his son died”. To the nobleman, Jesus replied, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe” (John 4:48). To the Centurion, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” The nobleman did not believe until the next

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, III, 8.

⁷ That is, at the laying on of hands at Christ’s Baptist.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXV, 2.

day when he inquired about what time his son was healed – which was the same time that Jesus told him, “Go your way; your son lives.”

The nobleman later “believed, along with his whole household.” Chrysostom stated that it was necessary for Christ to heal the father, who was sick in mind, no less than the son, in order to persuade us to pay attention to Him, not for His miracles, but for His teaching. “Miracles are not for the faithful, but for the unbelieving.” The faith of the Centurion had already been perfected; the nobleman regarded Jesus as if He were just a Prophet.

John Chrysostom noted⁹ that Jesus purposely allowed Lazarus to die before He arrived in order to instruct His followers not to be vainglorious and not to make promises without a cause. If they had said “Speak the word and Lazarus shall be healed”, He would have done so. But since they begged Him to come, He condescended in order to lead them upward from the humble opinion they had of Him.

“Why did Jesus say, ‘for your sakes’? (John 11:15) Because He had forewarned them of Lazarus’ death, and not being there, there would be no suspicion of deceit when He raised him. Do you see how the disciples were yet imperfect in their disposition, and didn’t know His power as they should? This was caused by conflicting terrors, which troubled and disturbed their souls. When He said, ‘He sleeps’, He added, ‘I go to awake him’; but when He said, ‘He is dead’, He didn’t add, ‘I go to raise him’; for He would not foretell in words what He was about to establish certainly by works, everywhere teaching us not to be vainglorious, and that we must not make promises without a cause. He did this also in the case of the Centurion, for He said, ‘I will come and heal him’ (Matthew 8:7), to show the faith of the Centurion. If anyone asks, ‘How did the disciples imagine Lazarus asleep?’ How did they not understand that death was meant from His saying, ‘I go to awake him?’, for it was folly if they expected that He would walk 30 miles to awake him from sleep. We would reply, that they thought this to be a dark saying, such as He often spoke to them.”

“‘Whoever lives and believes in Me, shall never die’ (John 11:26). Observe how He leads Mary’s mind upward; to raise Lazarus was not the only thing He sought; it was necessary that both she and they who were with her should learn the Resurrection. Therefore before the raising of the dead He taught heavenly wisdom by words. If He is ‘the Resurrection’, and ‘the Life’, He is not confined by place, but is present everywhere and knows how to heal. If therefore they had said, as did the Centurion, ‘Speak the word, and my slave shall be healed’ (Matthew 8:8), He would have done so. But since they summoned Him, and begged Him to come, He condescended in order to raise them from the humble opinion they had formed of Him.”

Delegation of Authority

The Centurion was a very remarkable individual, and he had a great deal of insight into the things of God. For a delegation of Jewish elders to come to Jesus at his request – or do anything voluntarily for a Gentile – is unheard of. He was a man under authority as carrying out the orders

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXII, 2.

of his cohort¹⁰, who directed the activities of the centurions under them, but also in turn commanding the hundred troops under him. For him to be loved and respected by the Jewish elders indicates his great humility. For him to be commended by Jesus for his faith indicates a great understanding on his part regarding who Jesus is.

Jesus also taught as One having authority, and not as the Scribes¹¹, who did not teach in this manner, but used reason and debate in their teaching. The Centurion picked up on this, and could relate to Jesus very well. John Chrysostom mentioned¹² that Jesus exhibited His authority in response to great faith not just with the Centurion, but also with the leper, calming the sea and the reaction of the demons:

“Since they had exhibited so great faith, He also exhibits His own power, with all authority absolving his sins, and signifying in all ways that He is equal in honor with Him that begat Him. And note, He implied it from the beginning, by His teaching, when He taught them as one having authority (Matthew 7:29). This was also true with the leper, when He said, ‘I am willing, be cleansed’ (Matthew 8:3), and with the Centurion, when he said, ‘Speak the word only, and my slave shall be healed’ (Matthew 8:8). Jesus marveled at the Centurion and celebrated him above all men. Similarly by the sea, when He curbed it with a mere word (Matthew 8:26); and by the demons, when they acknowledged Him as their judge, and He cast them out with great authority” (Luke 4:32-36, John 17:2).

Chrysostom also compared¹³ Christ’s command of authority with the Syro-Phoenician woman, the Centurion, the Samaritan woman and the woman having the flow of blood.

“With this intent did Christ put off the Syro-Phoenician woman off (Mark 7:26-27), for He knew what she would say; for this He denied the grant, that He might exhibit her high self-command.”

“For if He had not meant to give, neither would He have given afterwards, nor would He have stopped her mouth again. He did this also in the case of the Centurion, saying, ‘I will come and heal him’, that we might learn the godly fear of that man, and might hear him say, ‘I am not worthy that You should come under my roof’ (Matthew 8:7-8). He also does this in the case of her that had the issue of blood, saying, ‘I perceive that virtue has gone out of me’ (Mark 5:25-34), that He might make her faith clear. Also in the case of the Samaritan woman, that He might show how not even upon reproof she desists (John 4:16-19). So also with the Syro-Phoenician woman, He did not want that so great virtue in the woman should be hidden. Not in insult then were His words spoken, but calling her forth, and revealing the treasure laid up in her.”

“But do you see also the humility of the Syro-Phoenician woman together with her faith? For He had called the Jews ‘children’, but she was not satisfied with

¹⁰ A Roman Legion was divided into ten Cohorts, and each Cohort had six Centuries, each commanded by a Centurion. See Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 94.

¹¹ For a comparison of how Jesus’ authority differed from that of the Scribes, see Matthew 7:29, John 7:46, Matthew 21:23-27, Mark 1:21-27, Luke 4:31-36, Luke 20:1-8, John 14:10.

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXIX, 1.

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 3.

this, but even called them ‘masters’ (Matthew 15:26-27); so far was she from grieving at the praises of others.”

John Cassian took¹⁴ this issue of authority one step farther. If Jesus, the Centurion and others can obtain authority over the works of Satan in their lives, we also can take authority over our flesh and the temptations it is subjected to. To do this, we need the armor of God, such as the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of the hope of salvation (Ephesians 6:16-17). With these to help, we can become “rulers of hundreds”, such as were appointed by Moses (Exodus 18:21-25).

“There is an excellent figure drawn in the case of the Centurion in the gospel, regarding virtue and consistency. He was not led away by the rush of thoughts; with his own judgment he either admitted such as were good, or easily drove away those of the opposite character. ‘For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my slave, Do this, and he does it’ (Matthew 8:9). If then we strive manfully against disturbances and sins, we can bring them under our own control and discretion, and fight and destroy the passions in our flesh. We can bring under the sway of reason the swarm of our thoughts, and drive back from our chest the terrible hosts of the powers opposed to us by the life-giving standard of the Lord’s cross. We shall in reward for such triumphs be promoted to the rank of that Centurion, spiritually understood, who was mystically pointed to by Moses, ‘Appoint for yourselves rulers of thousands, and of hundreds, and of fifties and of tens’ (Exodus 18:21-25). When raised to the height of this dignity, we shall have the same right and power to command, so that we shall not be carried away by thoughts against our will. We shall be able to continue in and cling to those, which spiritually delight us, commanding the evil suggestions to depart, and they will depart. While to good ones we shall say, ‘Come’, and they will come; and to our slave also, i.e., the body, we shall in like manner add what belongs to chastity and continence, and it will serve us without any contradicting, no longer arousing in us the hostile incitements of lust, but showing all subservience to the spirit. The character of the armaments of this Centurion, their use in battle Paul declares, ‘The armaments of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty to God’. They are to be used, ‘For the pulling down of fortifications, purging the thoughts, and every height that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every understanding to the obedience of Christ, and having in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be first fulfilled’ (2 Corinthians 10:4-6). We ought always to walk with these armaments and their characteristics upon us if we mean to fight the Lord’s battles and to serve among the centurions of the gospel. ‘Take the shield of faith, so that you may be able to quench all the fiery bolts of the evil one’ (Ephesians 6:16). Faith then is that which intercepts the flaming bolts of lust, and destroys them by the fear of future judgment, and belief in the heavenly kingdom. ‘The breastplate of righteousness’ (Ephesians 6:14) is what goes around the vital parts of the chest and protects what is exposed to the deadly wounds of swelling thoughts; it deflects the blows directed at it, and does not allow the bolts of the devil to penetrate to our inner man. For it ‘endures all things, suffers all

¹⁴ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 5.

things, bears all things' (1 Corinthians 13:7). 'And for a helmet the hope of salvation' (Ephesians 6:17)! The helmet is what protects the head. Since Christ is our head, we always ought to protect it in all temptations and persecutions with the hope of future good things to come, and especially to keep faith in Him whole and undefiled."

Sitting Down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Two groups had come to meet Jesus on behalf of the Centurion: the first group were the Jewish elders who asked Jesus to come heal the Centurion's slave; the second group were friends of the Centurion, who came as Jesus approached the Centurion's house. When the friends of the Centurion returned to his house, they found his young slave healed (Matthew 8:13, Luke 7:10). After they left, Jesus went on to say, "many will come from East and West to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the sons of the Kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:11, 12). We might wonder where this remark came from, since these Jewish elders don't seem to show any hostility toward Jesus.

The many coming from East and West are Gentiles who come with a humble heart and submit themselves to the authority of Christ. The sons of the Kingdom, who will be cast out, are the Jewish leaders of Christ's day and others like them today, who are full of arrogance and pride and have no need for the authority of Christ.

Justin Martyr, writing to the Jewish philosopher Trypho, stated¹⁵ that Jacob's marriage to the two handmaids of his wives was an indication that Christ would receive the Gentiles with the Jews. However the Jews of his day could not understand this, and will be cast out of the Kingdom. Each man's wickedness is his own fault, and he cannot blame anything on God.

"Jacob, being himself a type of Christ, married the two handmaids of his two free wives, and of them begat sons, for the purpose of indicating that Christ would receive all those who are descendants of Canaan, equally with the free, and would have the children fellow-heirs. And we Gentiles are such; but you (Trypho) cannot comprehend this, because you cannot drink out of the living fountain of God, but out of broken cisterns. They are broken cisterns, and hold no water, which your own teachers have dug, as the Scripture asserts (Jeremiah 2:13), 'teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' (Isaiah 29:13). They deceive themselves and you, supposing that the everlasting kingdom will be given to those of the dispersion who are of Abraham after the flesh, although they are sinners, faithless, and disobedient towards God, which the Scriptures have proved is the case. Otherwise, why would Isaiah have said this: 'Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah' (Isaiah 1:9). And Ezekiel: 'Even if Noah, Daniel and Job were to pray for sons or daughters, their request would not be granted' (Ezekiel 14:18, 20). Neither shall the father perish for the son, nor the son for the father; but every one for his own sin, and each shall be saved for his own righteousness (Ezekiel 18:20). And again Isaiah says: 'They shall look on the carcasses of those that have transgressed; their worm shall not cease, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be a spectacle to all flesh' (Isaiah 66:24). And

¹⁵ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 140.

our Lord, according to the will of Him that sent Him, who is the Father and Lord of all, would not have said, ‘They shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness’ (Matthew 8:11-12). Those, who were foreknown to be unrighteous, whether men or angels, are not made wicked by God’s fault, but each man by his own fault is what he will appear to be.

Paul refers to this same thing when he compares the Gentiles to a branch from a wild olive tree (Romans 11:17) that was grafted into a cultivated olive tree, which is the nation of Israel (Romans 11:24). The natural branches were broken off because of unbelief (Greek *apistia* meaning unbelief, unfaith, untrusting; from this we get the English word apostasy). Yet God has plans to graft the natural branches back in when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (Romans 11:20, 25). We converts, then, can be very humble in that we are not only grafted in to the Orthodox faith, but also to the entire history of the people of God as a full partaker of all its root and richness (Romans 11:17).

Cyprian of Carthage connected¹⁶ the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy Kingdom come” with sitting down in the Kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is what we inherit when He says, “Come, you blessed of my Father” (Matthew 25:34). The Jews had it but lost it in trying to acquire the things of this world. As we abandon the things of this world, we begin to acquire the Kingdom.

“There follows in the prayer, ‘Thy kingdom come’. We ask that the kingdom of God may be set forth to us, even as we also ask that His Name may be sanctified in us. For when does God not reign, or when does that begin with Him which has always been, and never ceases to be? We pray that our kingdom, which has been promised to us by God, may come, which was acquired by the blood and passion of Christ. We, who are His subjects in the world, may reign with Christ when He reigns, as He Himself promises, ‘Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world’ (Matthew 25:34). Christ Himself, may be the kingdom of God, whom we day by day desire to come, whose advent we crave to be quickly revealed to us. Since He is Himself the Resurrection, since in Him we rise again, so also the kingdom of God may be understood to be Himself, since in Him we shall reign. But we do well in seeking the kingdom of God, that is, the heavenly kingdom, because there is also an earthly kingdom. But he, who has already renounced the world, is greater than its honors and its kingdom. Therefore he, who dedicates himself to God and Christ, does not desire earthly kingdoms, but heavenly ones. But there is need of continual prayer and supplication that we do not fall away from the heavenly kingdom, as the Jews, to whom this promise had first been given, ‘Many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall recline with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 8:12). He shows that the Jews were previously children of the kingdom, so long as they continued to be children of God; but after they ceased to recognize the Name of the Father

¹⁶ Cyprian, Treatises, IV, 13.

among them, the kingdom also ceased. Therefore we Christians, who in our prayer begin to call God our Father, pray also that God's kingdom may come to us."

The Outer Darkness

Jesus concluded His contrast of the faith of the Centurion and the Jewish leaders with, "But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12). Jesus also used the term "outer darkness" on two other occasions:

1. The man who came to the Wedding Feast for the King's Son without a proper wedding garment, and was thrown out (Matthew 22:13).
2. The unprofitable servant in the Parable of the Talents, who had been given the one talent (Matthew 25:30).

So we might wonder whether the Jewish elders that came to Jesus on behalf of the (Gentile) Centurion are in the process of rejecting the Light given them. A Gentile built them a synagogue out of great faith, and they appreciate it; but do they understand what is happening? Do their deeds correspond with the Light that is given to them?

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹⁷ that the "outer darkness" is for those who despised the wedding garment, which are the works of righteousness. The One who confers the eternal light rejects those who have rejected Him and sends them into darkness.

"Christ made it clear, that we ought, after our calling, to be also adorned with works of righteousness, so that the Spirit of God may rest upon us. This is the wedding garment, of which the apostle speaks, 'Not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality might be swallowed up by life' (2 Corinthians 5:4). But those who have been called to God's supper, yet have not received the Holy Spirit, because of their wicked conduct 'shall be', He declares, 'cast into outer darkness' (Matthew 22:13). He thus clearly shows that the same King who gathered from all quarters the faithful to the marriage of His Son, and who grants them the incorruptible banquet, also orders that man to be cast into outer darkness who does not have a wedding garment, that is, one who despises it. For as in the former covenant, 'with many of them was He not well pleased' (1 Corinthians 10:5); so also is it the case here, that 'many are called, but few chosen' (Matthew 22:14). It is not, then, one God who judges, and another Father who calls us together to salvation; nor one, who confers eternal light, but another who orders those who don't have on the wedding garment to be sent into outer darkness. It is one and the same God, the Father of our Lord, from whom also the prophets had their mission, who does indeed, through His infinite kindness, call the unworthy. But He examines those who are called, to ascertain if they have on the garment fit and proper for the marriage of His Son, because nothing unbecoming or evil pleases Him. This is in accordance with what the Lord said to the man who had been healed, 'Behold, you are made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you' (John 5:14). For he who is good, and righteous, and pure, and spotless, will endure nothing evil, unjust, or detestable in His wedding chamber."

¹⁷ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxvi, 5-6.

Jerome contrasted the outer darkness with our Baptismal vow. If we renege on this treaty, we may be cast into the prison of the outer darkness and severed from the one true light. In the illustration of the servant who had the one talent, but hid it in the ground, and was subsequently thrown to the outer darkness, Jerome stated that this servant ought to have lain before the altar what he was not able to bear.

“You have relinquished¹⁸ the world and besides your baptismal vow, you have taken a new one. You have entered into a contract with your adversary and have said¹⁹, ‘I renounce you, O devil, and your world and your pomp and your works’. Observe, therefore, the treaty that you have made, and keep terms with your adversary; otherwise he may some day prove that you have taken what is his²⁰. Then the judge will cast you into prison, into that outer darkness as it severs us from Christ the one true light.”

“Woe to the man who goes²¹ in to the supper without a wedding garment. Nothing remains for him but, ‘Friend, how did you come in here?’ And when he is speechless the order will be given, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 22:11-13). Woe to him who, when he has received a talent, has bound it in a napkin; and while others make profits, he only preserves what he has received. His angry Lord shall rebuke him in a moment. ‘You wicked servant’, he will say, ‘why did you not give my money to the bank that at my coming I might have received my own with interest?’ (Luke 19:23) That is to say, you should have lain before the altar what you were not able to bear. For while you, a slothful trader, keep a penny in your hands, you occupy the place of another who might double the money. Just as he who serves well obtains a good standing (1 Timothy 3:13), so he who approaches the cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”

Ambrose of Milan stated²² that the ground, in which the servant hid his one talent, was his own flesh. They delighted in the pleasures of the flesh and thus sunk the heavenly treasure into the pit of a self-centered heart.

“It is enough for me, if I am not thrust out into the outer darkness, as he was, who hid the talent entrusted to him in the earth, so to speak, of his own flesh. This the ruler of the synagogue did, and the other rulers of the Jews; for they employed the words of the Lord, which had been entrusted to them, on the ground, as it were, of their bodies. Delighting in the pleasures of the flesh, they sunk the heavenly trust as though into the pit of an arrogant heart.”

“Let us then not keep the Lord’s money buried and hidden in the flesh; nor let us hide our one talent in a napkin; but like good businessmen let us labor with mind and body, with an even and ready will, that the word may be in our mouth and in our heart.”

¹⁸ Jerome, Letter to Demetrias, CXXX, 7.

¹⁹ These are part of the words of the Baptismal service.

²⁰ That is, if we say that we have renounced the world, and then renege and want it back, we are taking things that don’t belong to us.

²¹ Jerome, Letter to Hellodorus, XIV, 8.

²² Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, Prologue, 13-15.

“This is the word of the Lord, this is the precious talent, whereby you are redeemed. This money must often be seen on the tables of souls, in order that it may go out into every country, by the means of which eternal life is purchased. ‘This is eternal life’, which You, Almighty Father, give freely, that we may know ‘You the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent.’”

Tertullian refuted²³ some in his day that said that the body is not raised as flesh. Since the Lord said that both body and soul would be destroyed in hell, there must be a resurrection of the body. And since it will take eternity to do this, the body must be raised immortal first.

“He teaches us, that ‘He is rather to be feared, who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell’ (Matthew 10:28), that is, the Lord alone; ‘not those which kill the body, but are not able to hurt the soul’, that is to say, all human powers. Here, then, we have recognition of the natural immortality of the soul, which cannot be killed by men; and of the mortality of the body, which may be killed. From this we learn that the resurrection of the dead is a resurrection of the flesh; for unless it were raised again, it would be impossible for the flesh to be ‘killed in hell’”.

“Body and soul are both set before us, that they are destroyed in hell; a distinction is obviously made between the two. The body, that is, the flesh, will be destroyed in hell, since it did not ‘rather fear’ being destroyed by God. The destruction of the soul and the flesh in hell is not a final annihilation of the two. It is their penal treatment, where they are to be punished, not consumed. The fire of hell is eternal, expressly announced as an everlasting penalty. This never-ending ‘killing’ is more formidable than a human murder, which is only temporal. We conclude that the substances must be eternal, when the penal ‘killing’ is an eternal one. The body, after the resurrection, will be ‘killed’ by God in hell along with the soul. It would be most absurd if the flesh should be raised up and ‘annihilated in hell’, when it might suffer such an annihilation more directly if not raised again at all.”

“He affirms that ‘the actual hairs of our head are all numbered’ (Matthew 10:30), and He includes the promise of their safety; for if they were to be lost, where would be the use of having taken such a numerical care of them? Surely the only use lies in this truth: ‘That of all which the Father has given to me, I should lose none’ (John 6:39), not even a hair, as also not an eye or a tooth. And yet where does that ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ come from²⁴, if not from eyes and teeth? At that time, the body shall be slain in hell, and thrust out into that outer darkness; this shall be the suitable torment of the eyes. He also who shall not be clothed at the marriage feast in the clothing of good works, will have to be ‘bound hand and foot’, as being, of course, raised in his body. So, again, the reclining at the feast in the kingdom of God, and sitting on Christ’s thrones, and standing at last on His right hand and His left, and eating of the tree of life, what are all these but most certain proofs of a bodily appointment and destination?”

²³ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, II, vi, 35.

²⁴ See Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 22:13, 25:30.

Slavery and Death

June 28, 2015
4th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: Romans 6:18-23

Paul spoke of the Gentiles as branches that were grafted in to a cultivated olive tree. “And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in’. Well said! Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith” (Romans 11:17-20).

So what is our role as grafted-in branches? From Romans 6, we are but slaves. Making a reference to the tradition in his day for conquering nations to make slaves (Greek: *doulos*) of their captives, Peter said, “For by whom a person is defeated, by him also he has been enslaved” (2 Peter 2:19). And Peter was referring to the slavery of sin. Paul also mentioned that we have been delivered from the slavery of sin (Romans 6:17). In conjunction with this, the Lord said, “Whoever commits a sin is a slave of sin. And a slave (i.e. *doulos*) does not remain in the house (i.e. kingdom) forever, but a son remains forever. If therefore the Son frees you, you will be really free” (John 8:34-36).

This creates a paradox: we have been freed from the slavery of sin, but we are still slaves of God (Romans 6:22). While we are just a slave – and an unprofitable slave at that (Luke 17:10) – we are still sons of the kingdom. While we are slaves of God, yet we are free (John 8:36). This is consistent with Old Testament slavery practices. An Old Testament slave-owner could designate his slave as his heir. Doing so automatically gave the slave his freedom and made the slave the legal son of his owner. For example, Eliezer of Damascus was Abraham’s heir until the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 15:2-3). Similarly, the Lord has designated us His heirs (Romans 8:16-17) even though we are totally undeserving of such (Ephesians 2:1-12).

John Chrysostom commented²⁵ on our situation, saying that we are like orphans with a kind foster father, who happens to be the King.

“There are two gifts of God, which he here points out. (1) The freeing from sin. (2) The making them slaves to righteousness, which is better than any freedom. For God has done the same as if a person were to take an orphan, who had been carried away by savages into their own country, and were not only to free him from captivity, but were to set a kind father over him, and bring him to very great dignity. And this has been done in our case. For it was not our old evils alone that He freed us from, since He even led us to the life of angels, and paved the way for us to the best conversation, handing us over to the safe keeping of righteousness, killing our former evils, deadening the old man, and leading us to an immortal life”.

Copyright © Mark Kern 2006

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 18.

Slaves of Righteousness

Paul continued by comparing our former life as slaves of sin with our new life in Christ as slaves of righteousness. As slaves of sin, we presented our members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness resulting in further lawlessness (Romans 6:19) and death (Romans 6:21). As slaves of righteousness, being enslaved to God, the result is sanctification or holiness (Romans 6:19) and eternal life (Romans 6:22).

As slaves of our Lord, we are grateful for all that He has done for us. The Lord Himself put it this way: “And which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that slave because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable slaves. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:7-10).

Tertullian, quoting Paul, stated²⁶ that we are dead to sin, not dead in the flesh, but we need to work at making our bodies slaves or instruments of righteousness. We need to control sin so that it doesn’t reign in our bodies. A rule of holiness for the flesh would not make sense if there was no reward within its reach.

“Paul says, ‘Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead to sin’ (Romans 6:11). As to the flesh they will be saved, alive to God in Christ Jesus, through the flesh. They will not be physically dead; it is to sin, and not to the flesh, that they are dead. He pursues the point still further, ‘Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts, and that you should yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin; but yield yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead’. We are not simply alive, but as alive from the dead, ‘and your members as instruments of righteousness to God’ (Romans 6:12-13). And again, ‘As you have yielded your members as slaves of uncleanness and lawlessness, so now yield your members as slaves of righteousness leading to holiness; for while you were the slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit had you then in those things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and becoming slaves of God, you have your fruit for holiness, and the end is everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Romans 6:19-23)! By withdrawing our members from unrighteousness and sin, and applying them to righteousness and holiness, we transfer the same from the wages of death to the gift of eternal life. He promises to the flesh the recompense of salvation.”

“Now it would not have been consistent that any rule of holiness and righteousness should be commanded for the flesh, if the reward were not also within its reach. Baptism could not even be ordered for the flesh, if by its regeneration a course were not available for its restitution. Paul himself suggests this idea, ‘Do you not know that as many of us as are baptized into Jesus Christ, are baptized into His death? We are therefore buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as

²⁶ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, II, vi, 47.

Christ was raised up from the dead, even so we also should walk in newness of life' (Romans 6:3-4). Paul adds, 'For if we have been planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection' (Romans 6:5). By a figure we die in our baptism, but in reality we rise again in the flesh, just as Christ did. 'As sin has reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness for life eternal, through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 5:21). Where the death is, there must be the life after the death. The life was first there, where the death subsequently was."

John Chrysostom noted²⁷ that there is a dramatic change in our behavior once we become children of the Light and slaves of righteousness. The fruit of the Spirit becomes obvious.

"Observe how wisely he urges them forward; first, from the thought of Christ, that you love one another, and do injury to no man. Then second, from the thought of punishment and hell-fire! 'For you were once darkness but are now light in the Lord' (Ephesians 5:8). This is what he says to the Romans. 'What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?' (Romans 6:21), and reminds them of their former wickedness. That is to say, thinking what you once were, and what you have now become, do not run back into your former wickedness, nor 'insult the Spirit of grace' (Hebrews 10:29). 'You were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord!' Not by your own virtue, but through the grace of God has this accrued to you. That is to say, you were at some time worthy of the same punishments, but now are so no more. 'Walk therefore as children of light'" (Ephesians 5:8).

"What is meant by 'children of light', he adds afterwards. His statement: 'In all goodness' is opposed to the angry, and the bitter; his statement: 'in all righteousness' is opposed to the covetous; his statement: 'in all truth' (Ephesians 5:9) is opposed to the false pleasure. The fruit of the Spirit ought to be evidenced in everything. That is, 'proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord'; so that the former things are tokens of a childish and imperfect mind."

Cyril of Jerusalem emphasized²⁸ that we came into this world sinless, and that all of our sins are by choice. If we sinned by necessity, and could not avoid it, there would be no point of hell; if we were naturally righteous, there would be no point in crowns of glory. By becoming slaves of righteousness, we choose our eternal destination.

"The soul, before it came into this world, had committed no sin, but having come in sinless²⁹, we now sin of our free-will. Do not listen to anyone perversely interpreting the words, 'But if I do that which I would not' (Romans 7:16). But remember Him who says, 'If you are willing, and listen to Me, you shall eat the good things of the land; but if you are not willing, and don't listen to Me, the sword shall devour you' (Isaiah 1:19-20). And again, 'As you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and to iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification' (Romans 6:19). Remember also the Scripture, which says, 'Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge'

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVIII, vv. 7-10.

²⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IV, 19-21.

²⁹ This viewpoint in the Orthodox Church is at variance with the concept of Original Sin in most Western Churches.

(Romans 1:28); and, ‘That which may be known of God is evident in them’ (Romans 1:19); and again, ‘their eyes they have closed’ (Matthew 13:15). Also remember how God again accuses them, ‘Yet I planted you a fruitful vine, wholly true; how have you turned to bitterness, and become a foreign vine?’” (Jeremiah 2:21)

“The soul is immortal, and all souls are alike both of men and women; for only the members of the body are distinguished. There is not a class of souls sinning by nature, and a class of souls practicing righteousness by nature; both act from choice, the substance of their souls being of one kind only, and alike in all.”

“The soul is self-governed; though the devil can suggest, he does not have the power to compel against the will. He pictures to you the thought of fornication; if you want it, you accept it; if you don’t want it, you reject it. For if you were a fornicator by necessity, then for what cause did God prepare hell? If you were a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, why did God prepare crowns of ineffable glory? Sheep are gentle, but sheep were never crowned for their gentleness, since their gentle quality comes not from choice but by nature.”

John Cassian compared³⁰ the Christian life to an archery contest, where the person who concentrates on the target and doesn’t lose sight of the goal wins the prizes. For us the target is eternal life, and any of the things of this world should not distract us from this target. We must also be careful not to lose sight of the target completely.

“Those whose business it is to use weapons of war, whenever they want to show their skill in their art before a king of this world, try to shoot their arrows into small targets, which have the prizes painted on them. They know that they cannot in any other way than by the line of their aim secure the prize they hope for, which they will only enjoy when they have been able to hit the mark set before them. If the target happens to be withdrawn from their sight, their aim may deviate from the straight path, but they cannot perceive that they have strayed, because they have no target. While they shoot their missiles idly into space, they cannot see how far they have gone wrong, and the target is their accuser. Also an unsteady look doesn’t help them to correct and restore the straight line to the target.”

“So then the end, which we have set before us is eternal life, as Paul declares, ‘you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life’ (Romans 6:22). The immediate goal is purity of heart, which he terms ‘sanctification’, without which the end cannot be gained. It is as if he had said in other words, ‘having your immediate goal in purity of heart, but the end life eternal’. Paul also teaches us of this goal, saying, ‘Forgetting those things, which are behind, and reaching forward to those that are ahead, I press toward the goal, for the prize of the high calling of the Lord’ (Philippians 3:13-14). That is, I press toward the mark, ‘With this aim, with which I forget those things that are behind, that is, the faults of earlier life, I strive to reach the heavenly prize as the end’. Purity of heart can help to guide us to this object namely, and we must follow with all our might; but whatever hinders us from it, we must shun as a dangerous and hurtful thing. For this we endure all things in order that we may retain a lasting purity of heart. When this object is set before us, we always direct our actions and thoughts straight

³⁰ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Moses, I, I, 5

towards the attainment of it. If it is not constantly fixed before our eyes, it will make all our labors vain and useless. It will also excite all kinds of thoughts opposed to one another. For the mind, which has no fixed point to which it may return, is sure to rove about from hour to hour and minute to minute in all sorts of wandering thoughts. From those things which come to it from outside, it will be constantly changed into that state which offers itself first.”

John Chrysostom stated that in Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul was not asking the Romans to do anything more as slaves of righteous than they used to do as slaves of sin. If they could just act like ordinary men, even with their human weakness, and make just as much effort to God as a master as they did to sin and the devil, they will do well.

“Through a desire³¹ to show that he is not making any exorbitant demand, nor even as much as might be expected of one who enjoyed so great a gift, but one quite moderate and light, he proves it, saying, ‘I speak after the manner of men’ (Romans 6:19). That is to say, going by human reasoning, by such as one usually meets with. For elsewhere he uses the same word. ‘No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man’ (1 Corinthians 10:13), that is, moderate and small. ‘As you have yielded your members as slaves to uncleanness and to iniquity leading to more iniquity; even so now yield your members slaves to righteousness, leading to holiness’ (Romans 6:19). Truly the masters (God versus sin) are very different ones, but still it is an equal amount of servitude that I ask. Men ought to give a much larger one to Christ. Nevertheless I make no greater demand ‘because of the weakness of your flesh’ (Romans 6:19). He does not say of the weakness of your free will or readiness of spirit, but ‘of your flesh’, so making what he says less severe. And yet on one side there is uncleanness, on the other side holiness; on the one side there is iniquity, and on the other side righteousness. And who is so wretched, and in such distress as not to spend as much earnestness upon the service of Christ, as upon that of sin and the devil?”

“When you lived³² in wickedness, impiety, and the worst of evils, you lived such that you did absolutely no good thing at all. That is, ‘you were free from righteousness’ (Romans 6:20). That is, you were not subject to it, but estranged from it wholly. For you did not divide the manner of servitude between righteousness and sin, but gave yourselves wholly up to wickedness. Since you have now come over to righteousness, give yourselves wholly up to virtue, doing nothing at all of vice, that the measure you give may be at least equal. It is not the mastership only that is so different, but in the servitude also there is a vast difference. And this too he unfolds with great clarity, and shows what conditions they served upon then, and what now. As yet he says nothing of the harm accruing from the thing, but just speaks of the shame.”

“Paul pointed out³³ some things as already given, and some as existing in hope, and from what are given he draws proof of the others from the holiness of the life. For to prevent your saying (i.e. as an objection) everything lies in hope, he points out that you have already reaped fruit”:

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v. 19.

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v. 20.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v. 21.

1. Being freed from wickedness, and such evils as even the recollection of it puts one to shame;
2. Being made a slave of righteousness;
3. The enjoying of holiness;
4. The obtaining of life, and life not for a season, but everlasting.

“Yet with all these, he says, just serve as you served it. For though the master is far preferable, and the service also has many advantages, along with the rewards for which you are serving, still I make no further demand.”

Chrysostom also spoke³⁴ of different kinds of servants. Paul was a special kind of slave of God, where his name was changed in order that he might draw closer to the Twelve.

“Why did God change Paul’s name from Saul to Paul? It was that he might not even in this respect come short of the other Apostles, but that the preeminence, which the chief of the Disciples had, he might also acquire, and grow closer to them. While Paul calls himself, the ‘slave of Christ’, there are many sorts of servants. One comes from the Creation, which says, ‘All are Your servants’ (Psalm 119:91); accordingly it says, ‘Nebuchadnezzar, My servant’ (Jeremiah 25:9), for the work is the servant of Him, who made it. Another kind is that from the faith, which says, ‘But God be thanked that you were the slaves of sin, but you have obeyed from a pure heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you. Being made free from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness’ (Romans 6:17, 18). Another is that from civil subjection.”

Struggling Against Sin

As a Christian, we will always have a struggle against sin. Peter warns, “Be sober, and be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Sometimes this struggle comes in the form of a worldly governmental body trying to inhibit us from godliness, or persecute us for trying to be godly. More often, however, the struggle is more personal, where we are tempted to align our minds and our actions with what the world thinks is good – and which may be completely opposite from what the Lord desires for us. In all these struggles, we are dependent on the Holy Spirit in us for guidance.

John Chrysostom stated³⁵ that Paul had terrified the Corinthians by referring to Old Testament examples (1 Corinthians 8-10) and concluding with “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Paul was with them “in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Corinthians 2:3), but they had not resisted to blood in striving against sin. Even resisting small things is very difficult without the assistance from God.

“They might have said, ‘Why terrify and alarm us? We have experience in these troubles, for we have been driven and persecuted, and we have continuously endured many dangers’. Repressing their pride, he said, ‘no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man’ (1 Corinthians 10:13); that is, small, brief, moderate. For he uses the expression ‘common to man’, with respect to what is small; as when he says, ‘I speak after the manner of men because of the weakness

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, I, v. 1-2.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIV, 1.

of your flesh' (Romans 6:19). 'Do not think about great things as though you had overcome the storm. You have never seen a danger threatening death nor a temptation intending slaughter'. He said this also to the Hebrews. 'You have not yet resisted to blood, striving against sin'" (Hebrews 12:4).

"Then, because he terrified them, he also raised them up, at the same time recommending moderation. 'God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to resist' (1 Corinthians 10:13). There are therefore temptations, which we are not able to bear. And what are these? All, so to speak! The ability to resist lies in God's gracious influence; a power which we draw down by our own will. That you may know that not only those which exceed our power, but even these which are 'common to man', it is not possible to bear easily without assistance from God. Therefore he added, 'But He will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it'" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

"For not even those moderate temptations can we bear by our own power; but even in them we require aid from Him in our warfare that we may bear them until we have passed through them. He gives patience and brings on a speedy release; so that in this way, the temptation becomes bearable. This he covertly intimates, saying, 'will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it'" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Another aspect of our struggle against sin has to do with what we have been called to do. Chrysostom spoke³⁶ of the Apostle Timothy's calling and noted that there is warfare against the forces of evil involved.

"The office of a Bishop and of a Priest is one of great dignity, and to bring forward one that is worthy requires a divine election. So it was of old, and so it is now, when we make a choice without human passion, not looking to any temporal consideration, swayed neither by friendship, nor enmity. For though we are not partakers of so great a measure of the Spirit as they, yet a good purpose is sufficient to draw to us the election of God. For the Apostles, when they elected Matthias, had not yet received the Holy Spirit, but having committed the matter to prayer, they chose him into the number of the Apostles. They looked not to human friendships."

"And so now it ought to be with us. If we overlook what is clear, how will God reveal to us what is unseen? As it is said, 'If you have not been faithful in that which is little, who will commit to your trust that which is great and true?' (Luke 16:11) When nothing human was done, the appointment of Priests was by prophecy. What does it mean 'by prophecy'? By the Holy Spirit! For prophecy is not only the telling of things future, but also the revealing of the present. It was by prophecy that Saul was discovered 'hidden among the baggage' (1 Samuel 10:22). For God reveals things to the righteous. So it was said by prophecy, 'Separate for me Barnabas and Saul' (Acts 13:2). In this way Timothy also was chosen, concerning whom he speaks of prophecies in the plural. Perhaps this occurred when Paul 'took and circumcised him' (Acts 16:3), and when he ordained him, as he says, 'Neglect not the gift that is in you' (1 Timothy 4:14). Therefore to elevate him, and prepare him to be sober and watchful, he reminds him by whom he was

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, V, vv. 18-19.

chosen and ordained, as if he had said, ‘God has chosen you. He gave you your commission; you were not ordained by human vote. Do not therefore abuse or bring into disgrace the appointment of God’”.

“When he speaks of a charge, which implies something burdensome, he adds, ‘This charge I commit to you, son Timothy’ (1 Timothy 1:18). The ‘committing’ implies that it is to be diligently kept, and that it is not our own. For we did not obtain it for ourselves, but God conferred it upon us; along with ‘faith and a good conscience’. What He has given us then, we should keep.”

“By these you should wage a good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18). He named ‘a good warfare’, since there is a bad warfare, of which he says, ‘As you have yielded your members as instruments to uncleanness and to lawlessness’ (Romans 6:19). Those men serve under a tyrant, but you serve under a King. He calls it warfare to show how strong a contest is to be maintained by everyone, but especially by a Bishop. We require strong arms, and sobriety, and wakefulness, and continual vigilance that we must prepare ourselves for blood and conflicts, must be in battle array, and have nothing relaxed. As in an army, all do not serve in the same capacity, but in their different stations; so also in the Church one has the office of a Bishop, another that of a disciple, another that of a private man. And, because this is not sufficient, he adds, ‘Holding faith, and a good conscience’ (1 Timothy 1:19). For he that would be a Bishop must first teach himself. If someone has not first been a good soldier, he will never be a general; so it is with the Bishop. Therefore he says elsewhere, ‘Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified’” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Sin Leading to Death

The Apostle John defined the term “Sin leading to death” as follows. He was referring to Christians, who had willfully sinned, and not to unbelievers.

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin, which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death” (1 John 5:16-17).

Paul gave more clarification to this willful sin by Christians, who had once been illuminated, but now refuse to acknowledge the Lord’s mercy.

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’ (Deuteronomy 32:35), says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people’ (Deuteronomy 32:36). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31).

John Chrysostom paraphrased this and said³⁷ that willful sin among Christians is like a drunkard who doesn't realize how bad the stench of stale wine is. Sins are like worms; if we nourish them, they can turn into the worms that never die. The most common form of willful sin is the love of money, especially when the love of money comes at the expense of a poor brother. In order to feed our desire for the things of this world, we place Christ Himself in third place behind our pets and our furniture.

“Christ might say, ‘I placed all the passions in subjection to you by baptism. How then did it happen that you have disgraced so great a gift, and have become one thing instead of another? I have killed and buried your former transgressions, like worms; how is it that you have bred others?’ Sins are worse than worms; worms harm the body, but sins harm the soul; and sins make the more offensive stench. Yet we don't perceive it, and so we are in no hurry to purge them. Thus the drunkard doesn't know how disgusting the stale wine is, but he that is sober has a distinct perception of it. So with sins also; he that lives soberly knows thoroughly that other mire. But he that gives himself up to wickedness, like a man made drowsy with drunkenness, does not even know that he is sick. And this is the most grievous part of vice: it does not allow those who fall into it to see the greatness of their own curse; as they lie in the mire, they think they are enjoying perfume. And so they don't have the power to get free. When full of worms, like men that pride themselves in precious stones, so they exult in these. And for this reason they don't have the will to kill them, but they nourish them, and multiply them in themselves, until they send them on to the worms of the world to come. For these worms are providers for those, and are not only providers, but even the fathers of those that never die; as it says, ‘their worm shall not die’ (Mark 9:44). These kindle that hell, which never extinguishes.”

“To prevent this from happening then, let us do away with this fountain of evil, and extinguish the furnace, and let us pull out the root of wickedness from beneath, since you will do no good by cutting off the tree above ground, if the root remains below, and sends up fresh shoots of the same kind again. What then is the root of the evils? Learn from the good farmer³⁸, who has an accurate knowledge of such things, and tends the spiritual vine and cultivates the whole world. What does he say is the cause of all the evils? The love of money! For the “love of money is the root of all evils” (1 Timothy 6:10). From this comes fighting, enmity, war, railings, insults, murder, thefts, and grave robbing. Through this all places are filled with blood and murder. On the sea, pirates are all around, thus devising a new mode of robbery. Through the love of money, the laws of nature have been subverted, relationships set aside, and piety itself broken through. The bondage of money has armed the right hands of such men even against the departed as they burst open sepulchers, reaching their impious hands even against dead bodies. All the evils that you may find, whether in the house, in the market-place, in the courts of Law, in the Senate, or in the king's palace, it is from this that you will find they all spring. For this evil it is, which fills all places with blood and murder; this lights up the flame of hell; this makes cities much worse than a wilderness. Those laws,

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 18.

³⁸ That is, the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

which have been made to stop their iniquity, they draw into alliance and fill the cities with murder and pollution. Is it not worse than murder to hand the poor man over to famine, to throw him into debtor's prison, and to expose him to famine, tortures and countless acts of insolence? For even if you do not do these things yourself, yet you are the occasion of their being done; you do them more than the servants who execute them. The murderer plunges his sword into a man at once, and after giving him pain for a short time, he does not carry the torture any farther. But by your slander, your harassing, your plotting, you make light look like darkness to him, and make him wish for death ten thousand times over; consider how many deaths you perpetrate instead of just one! And what is worse than all, you plunder and grasp, not impelled by poverty, but that your horse's bridle may be spattered over with gold, or the ceiling of your house, or the tops of your pillars. And what hell is there that this conduct would not deserve, when it is a brother, one that has shared in your blessings, and has been highly honored by the Lord. In order that you may deck out stones, and floors, and the bodies of animals, you are casting a brother into countless slander? Your dog is well attended to, while man, or rather Christ, for the sake of the hound, is plagued with hunger. What can be worse than such confusion? What is more grievous than such lawlessness? What streams of fire will be enough for such a soul? He that was made in the Image of God stands in a plight of famine, through your inhumanity; but the faces of the mules that draw³⁹ your wife glisten with gold in abundance, as do the skins and wood, which compose that canopy. The member of Christ, for whom He came here from Heaven, and shed His precious Blood, does not even enjoy the food that is necessary for him, owing to your greed. The beds are mantled with silver on every side, while the bodies of the saints are deprived even of necessary clothing. To you Christ is less precious than anything else, servants, mules, beds, chairs, etc. But if you are shocked at hearing this, don't do it, and the words spoken will not harm you. Cease from this madness, for plain madness it is, such eagerness about these things."

Clement of Alexandria defined⁴⁰ "death" as the fellowship of the soul with the body in a state of sin; whereas "life" is the separation from sin. The Mosaic Law was good, holy and spiritual as it tried to sort this out.

"The Law produces the emotion of fear. 'Therefore the Law is holy', and in truth 'spiritual' (Romans 7:12, 14), according to Paul. We must, then, in investigating the nature of the body and the essence of the soul, apprehend the end of each, and not regard death as an evil. 'For when you were the slaves of sin', Paul says, 'you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in those things in which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, being set free from sin, and having become slaves to God, you have your fruit to holiness leading to sanctification, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 6:20-23). It has been shown, then, that death is the fellowship of the soul in a state of sin with the body; and life the separation from sin. And many are the

³⁹ Our rides are different today, but the same ideas apply.

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, IV, 3.

prizes and penalties of lust which impede us, and the pits of wrath and anger which must be leaped over, and all the machinations of those who plot against us, that we must avoid — who would no longer see the knowledge of God ‘through a mirror’” (1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 3:18).

John Chrysostom illustrated⁴¹ this by comparing the Christian, who lives a corrupt life, to a king, with no subjects to defend him.

“For what would be the advantage of a king dressed in a purple robe and possessed of arms, but without a single subject, and exposed to all that had a mind to attack and insult him? In like manner it will be no advantage to a Christian to have faith, and the gift of baptism, and yet be open to all the passions. In that way the disgrace will be greater, and the shame more. Such a one, who has the diadem and purple, is so far from gaining by this dress any honor to himself, that he even does disgrace to that by his own shame. So the believer also, who leads a corrupt life, is so far from becoming an object of respect, that he is only the more one of scorn”.

Paul concluded the Epistle lesson, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

John Chrysostom outlined⁴² four different kinds of deadness or death as follows:

Table 1
Different Kinds of Deadness

Death	Example
Our Body	Abraham died but was not dead. “God is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matthew 22:32).
Our Soul	“Many who seem to breath and walk about are in a more wretched plight than the dead” – Chrysostom ⁴³ . “Follow Me; allow the dead to bury their own dead” (Matthew 8:22).
The Members of Our Body	“Put to death the members of your earthly body to immorality, impurity, etc.” (Colossians 3:5)
Baptism	“We have been baptized into Christ’s death” (Romans 6:3). “Our old man was crucified with Him, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6).

The wages of sin result in deadness of the soul as well as deadness of the body. The Lord Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 18.

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 18.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 18.

Paul contrasted the wages of sin with the Gift of God. Chrysostom noted⁴⁴ that Paul did not contrast the wages of sin with “the wages of good deeds” but with the Gift of God.

“It was not of themselves that they were freed, nor was it a due they received, neither yet a return on investment, nor a recompense of labors, but by grace all these things came about”.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v. 23.

THE PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE

The Earthly Sanctuary

Mary's Humility

The Presentation of Mary in the Temple – November 21st

November 21, 2017

GOSPEL: Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28

EPISTLE: Hebrews 9:1-11

INTRODUCTION

The primary importance of the Virgin Mary to the Church is the Incarnation. Because of this, the Virgin Mary is usually portrayed in iconography as holding her young Son. The message proclaimed by the icon is that God has come in the flesh, and here is proof: His mother holding her Son. This study seeks to introduce aspects of the life of the Virgin Mary that are not very commonly known from an historical viewpoint. The significance of some of the events in the life of the Virgin Mary including her place among the saints in glory is covered quite well in The Life of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Apostles Convent, which is recommended for further reading.

One can divide up the life of the Virgin Mary into four parts, each of which produced major changes in her life. These four periods of her life are covered in this study as follows:

	DATES	PERIOD	FEAST DAY
Part I	20 BC to 5 BC	Birth to Annunciation	Nativity of Mary; Presentation of Mary in the Temple
Part II	5 BC to 1 BC	Annunciation to Infancy of Jesus	Annunciation
Part III	1 BC to 30 AD	Jesus' Life & Ministry	See Appendix B
Part IV	30 AD to 55 AD	Pentecost to Her Death	Dormition of Mary

Parts I and IV use historical writings as their primary source with Scriptural references woven in where appropriate. Parts II and III use Scriptural references as a primary source and supplement this with historical writings for clarification.

Figure I is a family tree of the Lord Jesus in the Flesh. This was pieced together primarily from the Prologue from Ochrid which is a collection of brief accounts of the lives of the saints that originated in the Macedonian churches in the 1st Century and that has been added to over the years. Butler's Lives of the Saints is a similar work that came from the Church of Rome and that was started by Clement of Rome also in the 1st Century. The goal of both References 2 and 3 is

Copyright © Mark Kern 1997

that future generations might not forget the price that was paid by their forefathers in establishing the Faith.

Figure I will be referred to from time to time to aid in understanding events in the life of the Virgin Mary. In each of the four parts, when historical references are used, only the most commonly available ones will be used in cases where many refer to the same events.

Mary's Parents

The Virgin Mary's father, Joachim, was from the tribe of Judah, was a native of Nazareth, and was a descendant of King David. Mary's mother, Anna (Hebrew: *Hannah*) was a daughter of Matthan the priest (Figure 1) and was a descendant of Aaron the High Priest. According to First Century writings, Joachim was a shepherd by occupation and was very wealthy from owning large herds of sheep. In humbleness of heart, Joachim had the practice of offering more than the Mosaic Law required. One third of his income he gave to the Temple as his tithe, one third he gave to orphans, widows, strangers and the poor, and one third he kept for himself.

According to the Mosaic Law, a tenth (i.e. a tithe) was to be devoted to the Lord and was used to support the priests and Levites (Numbers 18:20-24), a second tithe was used for the festivals (Deuteronomy 12:12-19) and a third tithe every three years was set aside for the orphans, widows, strangers and Levites (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13). The Lord had promised that if people were faithful in doing this, He would open the windows of heaven and bless His people in the land (Deuteronomy 26:12-15, Malachi 3:8-10). The more Joachim gave, the more the Lord blessed him. While the Lord's blessing was strong on Joachim and Anna, there was one aspect where it was not: they were unable to have children.

Just as Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel, was ridiculed for being unable to have children (1 Samuel 1:1-10), so Joachim and Anna were ridiculed. People assumed that because the Lord's blessing was absent in this part of their lives, that there was some secret sin. (Compare the man born blind: it was assumed that either he or his parents sinned - John 9:2-3). In the case of Joachim and Anna, around the time of their 50th wedding anniversary, the high priest publicly refused to accept their offering, calling them cursed when they came to present their offerings in accordance with the Law.

The Conception of Mary

Joachim and Anna returned to Nazareth and retired separately for prayer and fasting with many tears. Joachim spent his time in the remote hill country with his flocks while Anna prayed in the garden of their home. Both prayed separately that the Lord would work in them the wonder that He had done with Abraham and Sarah. And they separately agreed that they would dedicate the child to the Lord as Hannah did with Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11-2:11).

When Joachim went to the hills to pray, he did not intend to return until the Lord answered his prayer. Knowing this, Anna prayed and wept, mourning both her barrenness, her reproach among the people and her imminent widowhood. During this time of fasting and prayer, an angel appeared first to Joachim, then to Anna telling them (1) that their charitable deeds had gone up

into God's presence, (2) that their shame among men in the face of righteous living had not gone unnoticed and (3) that the Lord was going to answer their prayers. As a sign of this, the angel instructed Joachim and Anna separately to leave Nazareth and go to Jerusalem immediately. When they got there, they would meet each other by the Golden Gate of the city. The angel went on to say that the child to be born (Mary) would be filled with the Holy Spirit from her mother's womb and her life would be exemplary among her peers. This is very similar to the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the priest Zechariah concerning the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:4-23).

Anna and Joachim hurried to Jerusalem without knowing that the other had seen the angel also. Anna arrived first and waited for a long time before Joachim arrived driving a large herd: 10 lambs for the Lord, 10 calves for the priests and elders and 100 goats for the people who had ridiculed him. Since this was not a prescribed offering but a freewill offering which even Gentiles could offer, the high priest could not refuse (Leviticus 17:8). An interesting teaching in a similar vein by the Lord 45 years later involved loving one's enemies and doing good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27-36).

When they saw each other, Joachim and Anna rejoiced greatly. The next day, they offered their offerings and returned home to Nazareth together. When it was heard that Anna had conceived, all their neighbors and acquaintances rejoiced also and the whole land of Israel congratulated them.

From the above account, there was no more of an "immaculate conception" of Mary than there was of John the Baptist. As a further illustration of the similarity of the birth of Mary to the birth of John, an icon of the Virgin with her Child and an icon of John are conspicuously displayed at the front of all Orthodox churches: John next to the Lord on His left; Mary on the other side of the altar on His right. The doctrine of the immaculate conception was declared by Pope Pius IX in 1854, but has its roots back in the 14th and 15th Centuries.

The Birth of Mary

The birth or nativity of Mary is celebrated in the Orthodox Church as one of the twelve major feast days of the Church Year. In this context, the Church Year begins September 1st and the first major event is the Nativity of Mary on September 8th (emphasizing the Incarnation), followed quickly by the feast day of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14th (emphasizing the Cross in our lives).

The Lord had said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37-38). Joachim and Anna certainly had to bear their cross prior to Mary's birth. And as will be seen in the study of the feast day of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, they did not hold back on their vow to dedicate Mary to the Lord's service. Beginning at the age of three, Mary began a celibate life of serving the Lord in the Temple in company with such notables as the Prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36-38), the Righteous Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) and the future Apostle Matthias (Prologue, August 9th).

Mary was born c.19 BC after a normal 9 month pregnancy. According to the Mosaic Law, Anna came to the Temple 80 days after giving birth to Mary for the rite of purification (Leviticus

12:2-8). At this time she gave her child the name Mary (Hebrew *Miriam*, just like Aaron's sister). Some discrepancy exists in early literature as to Mary's birth place: some say Nazareth; others say Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate. For a man as wealthy as Joachim, it is quite possible he had homes in both locations. However, his primary residence seems to be Nazareth.

Anna made her infant daughter's bed-chamber into a miniature copy of the Holy Place, like a sanctuary, and permitted nothing common or unclean to come near her. She also invited certain young virgins into her home to help care for and play with Mary. She was thus preparing Mary for the time when she would dedicate her daughter to the Lord's service as Hannah did the young Samuel.

According to Mosaic Law, the firstborn males received a blessing on the fortieth day after birth (Leviticus 12:2-4). This didn't apply to Mary; instead, Joachim invited the priests, scribes, elders and all the people to a feast at the first anniversary of Mary's birth. At this occasion, Mary was blessed by the priests and chief priests with the words "O God of our fathers, look upon this child and bless her with the utmost blessing which shall be an everlasting blessing, and give her an everlasting name throughout all generations." And all the people replied "Amen." This was an understandable reaction to Mary's birth to aged parents, just as "fear came on all those living in the hill country of Judea" (Luke 1:65-66) in reaction to the birth of John the Baptist to aged parents a few years later.

The Entry of Mary into the Temple

When Mary reached the age of three and was weaned (Hebrew mothers nursed their babies longer than modern women, 2 Maccabees 7:27, 1 Samuel 1:24) the time came for her to be dedicated to the Lord's service just as Hannah dedicated the Prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 1:21-2:11). This occasion was celebrated with considerable pageantry and ceremony and today the Orthodox Church celebrates this as another of the Twelve Major Feasts of the Church Year.

As part of the ceremony at the Temple, Mary was accompanied by a number of young virgins who had been her attendants. The chief priest was Zechariah who would later become the father of John the Baptist. The year was c.16 BC and there was some construction of the Temple going on as King Herod was financing major renovations. As Joachim and Anna presented their daughter to Zechariah as to the Lord, Zechariah was filled with the spirit and said, "Mary, the Lord God has magnified your name to all generations and, by you, to the very end of time, the Lord will show His Redemption to the children of Israel." With many other words Zechariah prophesied and rejoiced; then he led young Mary into the Temple with the other virgins. From the circumstances of her birth, everyone knew that there was something special about her.

For the next 7 years, Joachim and Anna visited young Mary often until they died. Joachim was 80 and Anna 79 when Mary was orphaned. During the construction of the new Temple, Herod had trained 1000 priests to be masons since only priests could enter the house and the inner court. At the time of Mary's entry into the Temple, the central part was completed but much construction was still underway. According to Josephus, however, the Ark of the Covenant was not in the Holy of Holies at any time during this period. Speculation today centers on whether the Ark had been carried away by the Babylonians or whether some priests hid it prior to the Babylonian invasion.

Growing up in the Temple

Mary's early years in the Temple were spent primarily in prayer and wool-work (weaving, etc.). From daylight to 9:00 a.m. she spent in prayer; from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. she spent doing her weaving; and from 3:00 p.m. until bedtime she returned to prayer. Even in her early years, she became well known as an excellent weaver surpassing old experienced women. Later as a young teenager, she and some other similarly skilled virgins were commissioned to spin the special thread for the new veil for the Holy of Holies that would separate the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

Her physical appearance was described as beautiful and cheerful. No one ever saw her angry nor heard her speak evil and all her conversations were full of grace. She was anxious also about her companions (the other young virgins) that they might not sin even in one word or raise their voice in senselessness or act proud before their parents. Mary guarded herself carefully that she might not even inadvertently offend or appear proud before her peers. Thus, even as a young teenager, she gave the impression of one many times her age and was steadfast, immovable and unchangeable in her desire for the things of God.

The Temple complex was much more than just the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Surrounding the Holy Place were many rooms that served as living quarters for the priests, Levites and attendants and for studying the Law. Yet it is uncertain how much of this was completed during Mary's stay there and there was probably some shuffling and movement as more was completed.

Early sources state that Mary spent a lot of her time in the Holy of Holies in prayers. (The Holy of Holies may have been incomplete and its veil may not have been installed yet). She lived very much like her nephew John the Baptist who was to be born a few years later and she ate just one meal per day. The additional food given her by the priests, she gave to the poor. Angels were recorded as visiting her regularly and sometimes bringing her food, just as an angel brought Elijah food on several occasions (1 Kings 19:5-8). This should not be too surprising, since even the manna in the wilderness is called "the bread of angels" (Psalm 105:40 LXX).

Mary was thus spared the turmoil of everyday life. She meditated and nourished her soul on the Scripture available in the Temple by day and night. None of her peers exceeded her in the praises and vigils of God and she was very learned in the Law of God. Yet no one was more lowly in humility, more elegant in singing or more outstanding in virtue. In short, she was well known as an extraordinary young girl.

Also living in and around the Temple during this time were the Prophetess Anna, the aged Simeon and the future Apostle Matthias. Anna's life was described by Luke as "serving God with fasting and prayer night and day" where she "did not depart from the Temple" for the last 50-60 years of her life (Luke 2:36-38). Anna was undoubtedly very instructive and supportive of the young Mary.

Simeon is referred to as the Host of God for his encounter with the baby Jesus at the time of Mary's purification (Luke 2:22). Simeon was also numbered among the seventy translators of the Septuagint (from Hebrew into Greek) where the Septuagint was the Old Testament text used by the early Church and quoted by most of the writers of the New Testament. The Apostle Matthias was a student of Simeon. Thus Simeon, and probably Matthias also, would have known the young Mary from her birth as she was growing up in the Temple. Simeon's knowledge of

Mary's early life lends additional insight into his blessing of Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:33-35) and his request to depart this life in peace (Luke 2:28-30), having now seen the Messiah. He would have known that she was someone special from the circumstances of her birth, from her devout life, and from the unusual circumstances of her conception.

The Earthly Sanctuary

November 21, 2017

Parables from the Old Testament

The birth of Mary began a process of revealing a mystery to mankind. “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ “ (1 Corinthians 2:7-9, Isaiah 64:4).

The three readings for Vespers of the Feast of the Presentation plus the Epistle lesson all deal with the comparison between the Temple or Tabernacle as the place where the Lord dwelt, and the Virgin Mary’s womb where the Lord dwelt for nine months. The intent of this is to challenge our concept of who the Lord Jesus really is. He is God of God; and just because He set His privileges (as Deity) aside to become man (Philippians 2:6-8) does not mean He ceased being God. This is a difficult subject to grasp.

The Scribes and Pharisees had a great deal of trouble with this. When He claimed to be God, they wanted to stone Him (John 10:29-33, 8:56-59); they would not accept His Deity even through His miracles, by themselves, testified that this was so (John 15:24, 14:10-11, 3:2).

The Matins Gospel, describing the visit of the Virgin Mary with her cousin Elizabeth addresses another aspect of Jesus’ Deity: some heretics throughout the ages have claimed that Jesus took on Deity, perhaps at His baptism. Yet Elizabeth’s words, when she was filled with the Holy Spirit, describe Mary as the mother of God (in the flesh). He was fully God in her womb for nine months. Thus her womb took on the role of a tabernacle, or temporary dwelling place for God. While she contained God in the flesh, we similarly contain the Holy Spirit in a foretaste (Ephesians 1:14), since our bodies are a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Glory of the Lord Filled the Tabernacle: Exodus 40:1-35

The Lord had given the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai in the third month of the year (Exodus 19:1), where the day of the giving of the Law was Pentecost (or the Feast of Weeks) according to Jewish tradition. Part of “The Law” was the Tabernacle and all its furnishings and all its procedures. Repeatedly, Moses was told to be sure to make the Tabernacle and its furnishings according to the pattern that was shown him on the mountain (Exodus 25:9, 40; 26:30; Numbers 8:4; Acts 7:44; Hebrews 8:5).

This reading from Exodus 40 took place in the first month of the second year after coming out of Egypt (Exodus 40:17). The Tabernacle, then, was about 9 months in construction (figuring a couple weeks for communication between Moses and God, both before and after construction).

Copyright © Mark Kern 1997

Once the Tabernacle was erected, everything in it, including the people who would enter as priests, were anointed with the anointing oil (vv.9-16). When everything was set up just as the Lord commanded Moses (vv.19-32), “then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the Glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. And Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the Glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle (vv.34-35).

This came to be the sign of the Lord’s Presence: the cloud over the Tabernacle. If the cloud was over the Tabernacle, they stayed where they were. If the cloud was taken up from the Tabernacle, they moved. The Lord appeared as a cloud **on** the Tabernacle by day and as fire **in** the Tabernacle by night such that all the house of Israel could see it (vv.36-38). Similarly, the Glory of God filled the humble Virgin Mary.

The Glory of the Lord Filled the Temple: 1 Kings 7:51-8:11

After Solomon had finished constructing the temple for the Lord, he followed a procedure similar to that used by Moses in the Tabernacle. After consecration, the priests brought in all the utensils dedicated by his father David, along with the tent of meeting and the Ark of the Covenant (vv.1-4). This was witnessed by the elders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ households and all the congregation of Israel (vv.1, 5), and took place in the seventh month (v.1) at the Feast of Tabernacles. [The Feast of Tabernacles speaks of the Kingdom of God in all its glory stretching out into eternity.]

After the priests came out of the Holy Place after depositing the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, “the cloud filled the House of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the Glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord” (vv.10-11).

The writer of 1 Kings pointed out that there was nothing in the Ark of the Covenant except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb; i.e., at Mt. Sinai (v.9). the tablets of stone had been placed there when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 25:16, 21; Deuteronomy 10:1-5). But a jar of manna had also been placed inside the Ark (Exodus 16:32, 33). This manna had been collected the first day the manna fell, which was before the Ark was built.

Also in the Ark was Aaron’s rod that budded. This was placed there following Korah’s rebellion (compare Jude 1:11 and Numbers 16), where Korah, Dathan and Abiram questioned Moses’ authority and rebelled, and the earth opened up and swallowed them. To further show that Aaron was the one the Lord had chosen to be high priest and not Korah or anyone else, Moses asked for a rod (or walking stick) from the patriarch of each of the Twelve tribes. He wrote the name of the tribe on those rods and placed them before the Lord overnight. The rod that budded would be the high priest that the Lord had chosen. In the morning, Aaron’s rod not only budded, but produced flowers and ripe almonds (Numbers 17:1-11).

The East Gate: Ezekiel 43:27-44:4

This reading is used also for the Nativity of Mary, the Annunciation, and the Dormition, and also speaks about the Temple. Ezekiel's vision took place during the Babylonian captivity (Ezekiel 40:1). Ezekiel saw a vision of some future Temple and he described this Temple at length. This Temple was to be "the place of My Throne and the place of the soles of My feet where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever" (Ezekiel 43:7). Presumably many, if not all, of the dimensions given to Ezekiel were incorporated in the Temple rebuilt by Ezra and Nehemiah after the captivity (Ezra 7:1-3) and reconstructed when Herod remodeled the Temple.

The parable here only addresses the East Gate of the Temple, which in Herod's Temple was the only gate into the Temple area. The East Gate opened onto the Garden of Gethsemane, the Kidron Valley, and the Mount of Olives. Similarly, the Tabernacle in the wilderness was always pitched such that the gate to the courtyard faced East. In Ezekiel's vision, the Glory of the Lord came into the house by the East Gate (Ezekiel 43:4). Ezekiel was told, "this gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut" (Ezekiel 44:2). The question about this passage is when was the East Gate permanently shut? There is no record of this occurring during or after the time of Christ; and "the Glory of the Lord" is unlikely to refer to anyone else.

Many of the Church Fathers spoke of this East Gate as prefiguring the Incarnation, where the East Gate represented the womb of the Virgin Mary. And as the East gate was shut in Ezekiel's vision, so the Virgin Mary remained a virgin her entire life according to her vow and the vow of her parents.

Epistle: Hebrews 9:1-7

The Epistle lesson also focuses on the Tabernacle, and by implication, the Temple that replaced it. Paul began by relating the Old Covenant (Genesis 15:18, 17:2; Exodus 19:5) to the Temple and the Divine services in and around the Temple. This was an important aspect of the Virgin Mary's life. When she was taken to the Temple as a three year old, the Temple life became her life along with all the services. Keeping a watchful eye on Mary were her cousin Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, along with Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38) who also spent a lot of time in the Temple. Part of this Temple life was the morning and evening continual burnt offering (called Matins and Vespers today) and the liturgy associated with it (Exodus 30:7-9). Living in the Temple, Mary developed a lifestyle of devotion to God that was later used by celebrities in monasteries and convents.

Women were restricted as to which parts of the Temple grounds they could enter, and there was a separate "courtyard of the women" for this purpose. As mentioned in the introduction, Mary seems to have circumvented these restrictions, perhaps due to her innocence as a child. She was also well-known for having regular contact with angels during this time, and even entered the Holy of Holies on more than one occasion.

Jerome (4th Century) described Mary at this time as a woman of "surpassing purity which made her fit to be the mother of the Lord". When Gabriel spoke to her, Jerome said that, "she was terror-stricken and unable to reply, for she had never been greeted by a man before" (Letter xxii). Ambrose (4th Century) stated that when Gabriel spoke to her, Mary trembled, being disturbed, as though at the form of a man; but on hearing his name, recognized him as one not unknown to her.

And so, she was a stranger as to men, but not as to the angel; that we might know that her ears were modest and her eyes bashful (Concerning Virgins II, chapter 2).

The Epistle reading describes what was in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In the Holy Place was the lampstand and the table with the showbread (v.2). The lampstand represents the Churches in various parts of the world (Revelation 1:20, 2:5). The table with the bread (eaten only by the priests), represents the Lord's table (1 Corinthians 10:21) also called the Lord's Supper that only the faithful, as priests of the New Covenant, partake of.

Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant and the golden censer (vv.3-5). Overshadowing the Ark of the Covenant were the two cherubim on the Ark and the other cherubim embroidered into the curtains and carved into the doors. Thus the Ark was surrounded with cherubim. The Ark of the Covenant represents the Throne of God, since He was described as being enthroned between the cherubim (2 Samuel 6:2, 2 Kings 19:15, 1 Chronicles 13:6, Psalm 80:1, 99:1). The golden censer represents the prayers of the saints that are continually brought to the Throne of God by the angels (Revelation 5:8, Leviticus 16:12-13).

The Epistle reading continues (vv.6-7) to describe the priestly activities in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The priests went into the Holy Place daily for the morning and evening offerings (Matins and Vespers) plus other additional services (Exodus 30:7-9). But only the High Priest was allowed into the Holy of Holies, and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur (the 10th day of the 7th month). He was required to take with him the blood of the offering for the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32; Exodus 30:10).

The Temple worship "was symbolic for the present time (i.e. prior to Christ) in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience" (v.9). Because of this, "The Holy Spirit indicated that the way into the Holy of Holies was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing" (v.8). John Chrysostom (4th Century) spoke of this saying: "These things indeed were there, but the Jewish people did not enjoy them; they didn't see them (i.e. they weren't allowed in). So that these things were no more theirs than ours for whom they prophesied", where Chrysostom also spoke of the Holy of Holies as representing heaven (Homily XV on Hebrews 9). This was inaccessible while the first tabernacle was standing because our Great High Priest (i.e. Christ) had not yet entered "behind the veil" with His own blood to complete the Day of Atonement offering (Hebrews 6:19-20). Now that this has been done, we have a foretaste and a downpayment of heaven - the Holy Spirit in us - and we can meet at the Throne of God in a mystery around the Lord's Table.

The Tabernacle and the Temple were just a copy of the real Tabernacle in heaven (Revelation 15:5) and Moses was directed to make everything according to the pattern shown him on the mountain (Exodus 25:9, 40). The question then becomes how could the Presence of God take up residence in the womb of the Virgin Mary? How could she contain God who is a consuming fire, reaching into the heavens, as He appeared on Mt. Sinai (Deuteronomy 4:11, Exodus 24:17), and in leading His people into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 9:3, compare Hebrews 12:29)? How could she contain Him who appeared as a cloud over the Tabernacle by day and as a fire in the Tabernacle by night?

This difficulty has led some heretics to state that Jesus wasn't God while He was in Mary's womb, but that He took on Deity later, like at His baptism. To say that He wasn't God while in her womb contradicts the Scripture, such as Elizabeth calling Mary "the mother of my Lord" when Mary was only about one week into her pregnancy (Luke 1:43). Others have claimed that Mary, herself, was without sin and was conceived immaculately for this express purpose. Yet according to historical accounts, Mary was conceived in a manner similar to John the Baptist; and no one claims that John was conceived immaculately.

The resolution of the difficulty regarding Mary containing the Son of God is threefold: First, she was prepared for doing so by her presentation in the Temple and her life of devotion to God in the Presence of God. Second, she was given a special and extraordinary measure of grace. As Gabriel said to her, "Hail highly graced one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). This type of accolade or praise is not recorded in Scripture as ever having been given to anyone, including Moses, who spoke with God face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11, Numbers 12:8, Deuteronomy 5:4, 34:10). And third, just as the Tabernacle and the Temple were filled with the Glory of God, so was the Virgin Mary. A careful consideration of this really elevates our understanding of the Incarnation.

Gregory of Neo-Caesarea (3rd Century), also called Gregory Thaumaturgus or Gregory the Wonder Worker to distinguish him from the other Gregories, had something to say about each of the above three points in his three homilies on the Annunciation. This Gregory was one of the saints in the early years of the Church who moved mountains with his prayers (according to John Chrysostom).

On Mary's Preparation

Gregory stated it this way: "The holy Virgin, in the life of the flesh, walked in all manner of virtues, and lived a life more excellent than man's common standard; therefore the Word that comes from God the Father thought it fit to assume the flesh, and introduce the perfect Man from her". He said she "would have had no strength to bear Him, had she not beamed forth for that time with all that is glorious and virtuous".

When she was greeted by Gabriel, "Hail you that are highly graced" (Luke 1:28), Gregory said that "she was perplexed by this word; for she was inexperienced in all the addresses of men, and welcomed quiet as the mother of prudence and purity. Yet being a pure and immaculate and stainless image herself, she did not shrink in terror from the angelic apparition, like most of the prophets, as indeed true virginity has a kind of affinity and equality with the angels. For the holy Virgin guarded carefully the torch of virginity, and gave diligent heed that it should not be extinguished or defiled" (Homily II on the Annunciation).

Gregory quotes Psalm 132 as referring to Mary: "Arise O Lord to Thy resting place; Thou and the ark of Thy sanctification" (Psalm 132:8). In this regard, he said, "For the holy Virgin is in truth an ark, wrought with gold both within and without (Exodus 25:10-11, 37:1-2), that has received the whole treasury of the sanctuary" (Homily I on the Annunciation). Gregory also quotes Psalm 45 regarding Mary, "Harken, O daughter; give attention and incline your ear; forget your

own people and your father's house. So shall the King greatly desire your beauty; for He is the Lord your God, and you shall worship Him" (Psalm 45:10, 11).

All this was the result of Mary's preparation during the approximately 12 years that she lived in the Temple. She lived a very righteous life. Those who say that she was able to do this because she was born without sin tacitly assume she couldn't live a righteous life otherwise. In fact, the Lord did not pick just any Jewish girl to be His earthly mother; He picked a girl who was exemplary in purity of heart, soul, mind and strength.

On Mary's Gift of Grace

Gregory stated that Gabriel called Mary "highly graced" inasmuch as with her was laid up the full treasure of grace. For of all generations, she alone has risen as a Virgin pure in body and in spirit; and she alone bears Him who bears all things on His Word. Nor is it only the beauty of this holy one in body that calls forth our admiration, but also the innate virtue of her soul" (Homily I on the Annunciation). Gabriel, he said, was sent to prepare the worthy chamber for the pure spouse and that her mind and her members were sanctified together (Homilies II, III on the Annunciation). As a result, she has been indeed set forth as the true cherubic throne (Homily II on the Annunciation).

Gregory stood in amazement at this saying, "The bounds of heaven and earth do not contain Him and how shall the womb of a virgin contain Him? Yet the tent of Abraham contained Him (Genesis 18), and there were there the depths of hospitality, where He showed Himself to Abraham at the door of the tent. But He quickly passed by it, as He who fills all things."

"But how also can Mary sustain the fire of the divinity? The Throne of God blazes with the illumination of its splendor; and can the Virgin receive Him without being consumed? Yet if the fire in the wilderness injured the bush (Exodus 3:2), the Lord's coming will indeed also injure Mary. But if that fire which served as a foreshadowing of the advent of the fire of divinity from heaven fertilized the bush and did not burn it, what can one say further of the Truth that descends not in flame of fire but in the form of rain (Psalm 72:6)? Both are the coming of the Lord (Homily III on the Annunciation). Truly Mary was given a great deal of grace.

One might note in this context that Paul referred to the Church as "abounding in the riches of His Grace" (Ephesians 1:7-8). In this respect Mary prefigures the Church as the dwelling place of God. But the Church has the Holy Spirit as a down payment (Ephesians 1:14); Mary contained Him who was the fullness of God (Colossians 2:9).

Mary was Filled with the Glory of God

Gregory elaborated on Mary's consternation at the angelic announcement when she said, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34). She did not wish to negate her vow of chastity, yet this seemed like she was being asked to do so. To her, Gregory said, the honor of virginity would seem to be on the verge of being lost. As the angel explained, the Lord was with her (Luke 1:28), but the Lord was also going to be of her (Luke 1:35) in His flesh. This is the Glory of the Lord dwelling with the handmaiden. "He that is fairer than the sons of men" (Psalm

45:2) dwells with the fair virgin; He who sanctifies all things dwells with the undefiled (Homily I on the Annunciation).

“This creates a mystery which transcends all wonders: The Virgin brought forth and bore in her hand Him who bears the whole creation by His Word. He found no room in the inn Who formed the whole earth by His Word. She nourished with her milk Him Who imparts sustenance and life to everything that has breath. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes who binds the whole creation fast with His Word. She laid Him in a manger Who rides seated upon the cherubim. A light from heaven shone round about Him who lightens the whole creation. The host of heaven attended Him with their doxologies who is glorified in heaven from before all ages. A star with its torch guided them who had come from the distant parts of the earth toward Him Who is the true Orient. From the East came those who brought gifts to Him Who for our sakes became poor. And the holy mother of God kept these words and pondered them in her heart, like one who was the receptacle of all the mysteries (Homily II on The Annunciation). Truly Mary was filled with the Glory of God and there can be no doubt as to Who it was that was in her womb for nine months.

Ambrose stated that when Gabriel said to Mary “Hail, full of grace” (Luke 1:28), he was plainly declaring the grace of the Holy Spirit which was in her, because the Holy Spirit had come upon her, and she was about to have her womb full of grace with the heavenly Word” (On the Holy Spirit I, chapter 7).

At the Feast of the Presentation of Mary, we see the beginning of all this, and we can see where it is leading up to. Some of the early historical accounts of the birth of Christ state that Mary began to have contractions as she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. Joseph quickly settled Mary in a shepherd’s cave while he went to get a midwife. When he returned with the midwife, they both saw a luminous cloud settled over the cave and found that Mary had already given birth to the Son of God. When the angel announced this to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-15), and they hurried to Bethlehem to see it, this luminous cloud is what astonished them. They also saw the Glory of the Lord that Mary had been filled with. Would “all those who heard it marvel at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:18), if all that the shepherds saw was a cute manger scene? The shepherds saw what Israel in the wilderness saw, and they returned to their flocks glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen (Luke 2:20).

Mary's Humility

November 21, 2017

Matins Gospel: Luke 1:39-49, 56

Mary's humility, like that of her Son is illustrated in the Matins Gospel for the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, which is also used for the Nativity, the Annunciation and the Dormition (Luke 1:39-49, 56). This text describes Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, after the Annunciation. This reading and Gabriel's greeting to Mary preceding the Matins Gospel illustrate Mary's deep humility.

In the Annunciation, Gabriel's words: "Rejoice, highly graced one" (v.28) and "you have found grace with God" (v.30) indicate a very special honor to Mary. [The word "grace" and "graced" is the Greek word *charis* and is translated "grace" everywhere else in the New Testament, but often not translated so here.] If we compare this to Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah regarding the birth of John, Gabriel did not call Zechariah "highly graced". And yet it was quite an honor to be the father of John the Baptist -- whom Christ called the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:28). Mary's response to Gabriel's announcement was a very humble statement, "Behold the slave (female) of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). An archangel had just given her accolades unprecedented in all of human history and she still referred to herself as a slave!!! This is genuine humility!

As Mary arrived at Elizabeth's house following the Annunciation, Elizabeth, in the Spirit, spoke with a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (vv.42-43). Elizabeth recognized that Mary was pregnant with the Son of God and therefore "highly graced". This Elizabeth recognized even though Mary was in her first week of pregnancy.

But Mary's reaction was one of great humility, both to Gabriel and to Elizabeth. To Gabriel, Mary merely replied, "Behold the maidservant (i.e. female slave) of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (v.38). To Elizabeth, Mary replied, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant (i.e. female slave); for behold, hence forth all generations will call me blessed (vv.46-48).

Even though she was so "highly graced" for bearing the Son of God, Mary never sought to exalt herself during her life. She was always content to stay in the background, praying, while the Twelve and others got all the recognition. This is a very good example for us: the only person who was ever called "highly graced" by God never sought recognition for herself. This is quite a contrast to attitudes today where it is fashionable to be arrogant and obnoxious and to revile anything that isn't easily understood.

Copyright © Mark Kern 1997

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28

The Gospel lesson of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, also used for the Nativity of Mary and the Dormition, is Luke 10:38-42 and Luke 11:27-28. The first part is the account of Mary and Martha when Jesus was invited to their house for dinner. Both Mary and Martha were among the eight “Myrrh-Bearing Women” at the Cross and at the Tomb. They were fairly wealthy and helped finance Jesus’ public ministry along with Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna and the others (Luke 8:3). We see their wealth in (1) Mary’s ability to afford oil of spikenard worth 300 denarii to pour on Jesus (Mark 14:3-5; John 12:1-3) and (2) Lazarus’ funeral including the burial wrappings, a new tomb and prominent people in attendance (John 11:35-46). Common folk couldn’t afford a funeral like this and were buried much more simply.

The dinner at Mary and Martha’s took place in late 29 AD, or just a few months before the Crucifixion. Mary and Martha had been traveling with Jesus and helping to finance His ministry for several years at this time. During that time, it would have been their role to work in the background providing meals and accommodations for Jesus, the Twelve, the Seventy, etc. In this Gospel account, Martha was busy doing all the things she had been doing these last few years (Luke 10:40), but Mary took time out to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen (v.39).

The work carried out by the Myrrh-Bearing Women was a humble but necessary work. Martha reminded Mary that she needed to do her part and she even asked Jesus to back her up (v.40). Jesus replied by saying, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (vv.41-42). Martha had become somewhat arrogant in her preoccupation with serving; Mary had maintained her humble focus on doing the Lord’s Will. The serving really didn’t need to get done right away. The Lord could always have broken loaves and fish and fed the Seventy as He did the 5,000.

This Gospel lesson is used for feast days involving the Virgin Mary even though the person involved is Mary of Bethany. Mary of Bethany in this account illustrates the personality of the Virgin Mary: maintaining a quiet, cheerful devotion without getting overly concerned about material things. And this is also a good lesson for us: hearing the Lord’s Word is the most important part of our lives and this won’t be taken away from us. Positions of leadership may come to an end, but hearing the Lord’s voice goes on forever.

The second part of the Gospel lesson involves a brief answer Jesus made to a comment from someone in the crowd. Jesus had just taught His followers to pray using the Lord’s Prayer, explaining how our Heavenly Father is a good father (Luke 11:2-13). Following this, Jesus cast a demon out of a person who was demon-possessed, blind and mute. When the formerly possessed person then saw and spoke, the multitudes marveled and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” (Matthew 12:22-24, Luke 11:14-16). The Pharisees, however, ridiculed Jesus by saying that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Jesus then proceeded to debunk this claim by showing that Satan’s kingdom would be divided against itself if their claims were true.

Following this debunking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts which nursed you!” Jesus replied, ‘More than that; blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it’ “ (Luke 11:27-28).

Jesus had just been publicly acknowledged as the Messiah, the Son of David. The woman in the crowd was stating what every Jewish woman longed for: to be the mother of the Messiah. Such was to be a position of great honor and being barren was considered a curse since it meant that a woman couldn’t possibly be the mother of the Messiah.

In replying as He did, Jesus was not denying that His mother was blessed. He was merely pointing out that everyone else can be blessed also by hearing the Word of God and keeping it. This the Virgin Mary did very well.

The Family Tree of Jesus

FAMILY TREE OF JESUS

