

THE MAN BORN BLIND
Opening Our Eyes
THE CHURCH IN MACEDONIA

May 24, 2009
6th Sunday of Pascha
Revision G

GOSPEL: John 9:1-38
EPISTLE: Acts 16:16-34

Today’s Gospel and Epistle lessons are used in some Western churches but not others. Where used, the Gospel lesson is used for the 4th Sunday of Lent and the Epistle for the 7th Sunday after Easter. In the Eastern lectionary, the Epistle lesson is the fifth in a seven part series on the development of the Early Church.

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A recurring theme for today's Gospel and Epistle is that of opening our eyes. For example, eyes opened in these texts were the man born blind (both physical and spiritual), and the spiritual eyes of the slave girl, the jailor and the prisoners in the Epistle. From our point of view, there is a lot going on around us that we can't see. Just as Elisha opened his servant's eyes to see the armies of God all around him (2 Kings 6:17) so the people in our Gospel and Epistle lesson gained some significant insight into what was happening around them. The lesson for us is to seek to get a glimpse of what is going on around us also.

Gospel: John 9:1-38

In today's Gospel lesson, which took place in about December, 29 AD, Jesus had just come from a confrontation with the Jewish leaders that ended with their picking up stones to stone Him to death for claiming equality with the Father (John 8:58-59). John Chrysostom stated¹ that Jesus went straight from there to the man born blind, intentionally, to demonstrate what He had been saying, that He is equal with the Father.

Today's Gospel lesson appears in sharp contrast to the Gospel lesson two weeks ago (John 5:1-15). Two weeks ago, we read about Jesus healing the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda at Pentecost, 28 AD. In that case there was implication of sin being involved with the man's paralysis since Jesus said, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more lest a worse thing come upon you" (John 5:14). Disease and physical deformities can be the result of our sin.

Who Sinned, This Man or His Parents?

In the introductory statements to today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples assumed that either the blind man or his parents had sinned, thus causing his condition. This assumption was probably based on the statement in the Ten Commandments regarding the Lord's response to His people making idols for themselves, "You shall not worship (the idols) or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me" (Deuteronomy 5:9, also Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18).

Chrysostom argued² that the Lord's words about the 3rd and 4th generation are not universal.

"But if anyone argues, how then is it said, 'Who visits the sins of the parents upon the children unto the third and fourth generation?' (Deuteronomy 5:9). We should make this answer that the assertion is not universal, but that it is spoken with reference to those who came out of Egypt. Its meaning is of this kind: Since these who have come out of Egypt, after signs and wonders, have become worse than their forefathers who saw none of these things, they shall suffer the same that those others suffered since they have dared³ the same crimes".

¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

³ Compare also Deuteronomy 24:16, 2 Kings 14:5-6, Ezekiel 18:1-23.

John Chrysostom stated⁴ that Jesus' disciples remembered the paralytic who had been paralyzed because of his sins, but they were perplexed about the man born blind. It was not possible to say that he had sinned, since he was blind from birth. One could not say that his parents had sinned either, since the child doesn't suffer punishment for the sins of the father (Deuteronomy 24:16). The disciples were not so much asking a question here as they were expressing their perplexity.

Jesus quickly pointed out (John 9:3) that neither the blind man's sin nor his parents' sin was the cause, "but that the works of God should be revealed in him." In other words, Jesus was about to demonstrate His equality with the Father. While it is true that sometimes diseases are caused by our sin, other times there are much bigger events taking place. For example, consider the patriarch Job, whom God referred to as the most righteous man on earth (Job 1:8, 2:3). Yet Job was asked to endure extremely painful skin (and other) diseases (Job 2:7), utter poverty (Job 2:8) and deep sadness from the loss of his 10 children (Job 1:18-19). It was so bad that Job's wife advised him to just curse God and die (Job 2:9). Just get it over with; end the pain. The larger event taking place was the building of Job's faith, and the proving to Satan that he is impotent in overthrowing the things God has established. Job was rewarded for his faithfulness both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17).

As the account develops about the blind man, not only were the blind man's physical eyes opened, but his perception of the things of God was also expanded and he pursued the things of God with a singular tenacity! Chrysostom pointed out⁵ that the blind man received a great benefit from his blindness since by it he recovered the sight of the eyes within.

John Cassian noted⁶ that some sufferings are brought upon us simply for the revealing of the glory of God and His works, according to these words, 'Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but that the works of God might be revealed in him' (John 9:3). Similarly with Lazarus, 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God that the Son of God may be glorified through it' (John 11:4).

Jerome, writing to the blind Castrutius, advised⁷ him not to think of his blindness as due to sin. If this were so, then Isaac and Jacob would have been in sin when they blessed their children with prophetic foresight. We all suffer some afflictions. A good illustration is the response of Antony to the blind Didymus that it is better to have spiritual insight than eyes of flesh. Jerome said:

"I ask you not to regard the bodily affliction which has fallen on you as due to sin. When the Apostles speculated concerning the man that was born blind and asked our Lord, 'Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?', they were told, 'Neither this man nor his parents have sinned, but that the works of God should be made clear in him' (John 9:2-3). We see numbers of heathen, Jews, heretics, et cetera, rolling in the mire of lust, bathed in blood, surpassing wolves in ferocity. After all this the plague does not come near their dwelling! (Psalm 91:10) They are not struck down as other men; they grow insolent against God as they lift up their faces to heaven in mockery. On the other

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

⁶ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Theodore, I, vi, 11.

⁷ Jerome, Letter to Castrutius, LXVIII, 1-2.

hand holy men are afflicted with sickness, misery and want, and perhaps they are tempted to say, 'Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain.' Yet the saints go on to reprove themselves, 'If I had spoken thus, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children' (Psalm 73:13, 15). If you suppose that your blindness is caused by sin, you will think Isaac a sinner because he was so wholly sightless that he was deceived into blessing one whom he did not mean to bless (Genesis 27). You will charge Jacob with sin, whose vision became so dim that he could not see Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:10-20), although with the inner eye and the prophetic spirit he could foresee the distant future and the Christ that was to come of his royal line (Genesis 49:10). Were any of the kings holier than Josiah? Yet he was slain by the sword of the Egyptians (2 Kings 23:29). Were there ever loftier saints than Peter and Paul? Yet their blood stained the blade of Nero. And did not the Son of God endure the shame of the cross? Do you fancy those blessed who enjoy in this world happiness and pleasure? God's hottest anger against sinners is when he shows no anger. He says to Jerusalem, 'I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and I will be angry no more' (Ezekiel 16:42). Everyone 'whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives' (Hebrews 12:6). The father does not instruct his son unless he loves him. The master does not correct his disciple unless he sees in him signs of promise. Once the doctor gives up caring for the patient, it is a sign that he despairs. You should answer this way, 'Just as Lazarus in his lifetime' (Luke 16:25) received evil things so will I now gladly suffer agony that future glory may be laid up for me. 'Affliction will not rise up a second time' (Nahum 1:9). If Job, a man holy, spotless and righteous in his generation, suffered terrible afflictions, his own book explains the reason why."

"Consider an incident which happened in my childhood. The saintly Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, had summoned the blessed Antony to that city to confute the heretics there. Didymus, a man of great learning who had lost his eyes, came to visit the Antony and, as the conversation turned on the Holy Scriptures, Antony could not help admiring his ability and insight. At last Antony said, 'You do not regret the loss of your eyes, do you? At first Didymus was ashamed to answer, but when the question had been repeated a second time and a third time, he frankly confessed that his blindness was a great grief to him. Antony said, 'I am surprised that a wise man should grieve at the loss of a faculty which he shares with ants, flies and gnats, and not rejoice rather in having one of which only saints and apostles have been thought worthy'. From this story you may perceive how much better it is to have spiritual than carnal vision and to possess eyes into which the plank of sin cannot fall'" (Luke 6:42).

Jerome also wrote⁸ to Demetrias, a noble Roman lady who had recently embraced the celibate life, to beware of a heresy that started in Egypt and had spread to parts of the East. The heresy stated that people are reincarnated with birth defects, similar to the man born blind, because of sins in past lives, and that this is part of their punishment.

"Men of this type whisper in corners and pretend to inquire into the justice of God. Why, they ask, was a particular soul born in a particular province? What

⁸ Jerome, Letter to Demetrias, CXXX, 16.

is the reason that some are born of Christian parents, others among wild beasts and savage tribes who have no knowledge of God? Wherever they can strike the simple with their scorpion-sting, there they deposit their venom. 'Is it for nothing', they argue, 'that a little child, which has done nothing good or evil, is seized by a demon or overwhelmed with jaundice or doomed to bear afflictions which godless men escape, while God's servants have to bear them?' Now if God's judgments, they say, are 'true and righteous altogether' (Psalm 19:9), and if 'there is no unrighteousness in Him' (Psalm 92:15), we are compelled by reason to believe that our souls have pre-existed in heaven. Our souls are condemned and buried in human bodies because of some ancient sins, and we are punished in this valley of weeping (Psalm 84:6 LXX) for old misdeeds. This according to them is the prophet's reason for saying, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray' (Psalm 119:67), and again, 'Bring my soul out of prison' (Psalm 142:7). They explain in the same way the question of the disciples in the gospel, 'Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?', (John 9:2), and similar passages."

"This godless and wicked teaching was formerly ripe in Egypt and the East; and now it lurks secretly like a viper in its hole among many persons in those parts, defiling the purity of the faith and gradually creeping on like an inherited disease till it attacks a large number. But I am sure that if you hear it you will not accept it. For you have teachers under God whose faith is a rule of sound doctrine. You will understand what I mean, for God will give you understanding in all things."

The Works of the Father

Jesus said to the Twelve, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the night is coming when no one can work*. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4-5). The works that the Son was doing are the same as the works of the Father.

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁹ that since the Son is the Power of the Father, all the works of the Son are also the works of the Father.

"Those who were saved by the Son were saved by the Power of the Father, and those who are judged by Him undergo judgment by the Righteousness of God. For 'Christ', as Paul says, 'is the Righteousness¹⁰ of God' (Romans 1:17), which is revealed by the Gospel. Whether you look at the world as a whole, or at the parts of the world, which make up that complete whole, all these are works of the Father, in that they are works of His Power. Thus the word that says both that the Father made all things (Ephesians 3:9), and that none of these things came into being without the Son (Hebrews 1:8-10, John 1:2-3, Colossians 1:16), speaks truly on both points. The operation of the Power is related to Him, Whose Power It is. Since the Son is the Power of the Father¹¹, all the works of the Son are also works of the Father. Christ entered His Passion not by weakness of nature but by

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 3.

¹⁰ That is, Christ is revealed as the Righteousness of God by the Scriptures.

¹¹ Christ is referred to as the Power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24); but the Scriptures (Romans 1:16) and the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:18) are also referred to as the power of God. At one time, the people of Samaria thought that Simon Magus was the Power of God (Acts 8:10).

the power of His will; one could bring forward countless passages of the Gospel to show this.”

Hilary of Poitiers described¹² the works of the Father and the Son; both are Divine works. The Son can do nothing of Himself because He is begotten and has no power of initiation. He is sent; He does not initiate. As soon as He sees the Father working, He can work. The fact that He can see the Father’s works proves that He is a possessor of Divinity. By refusing to honor the Son, who is doing Divine work, we also refuse to honor the Father.

“The Father works and the Son works. In Father and Son, the Names express Their nature in relation to Each other. Note also that it is the Divine nature, that is working here, and it is the operation of two like natures that is described. Concerning the blind man it was said, ‘But that the works of God should be revealed in him, I must work the works of Him that sent Me’ (John 9:3-4). In his case the work done by the Son is the Father’s work.”

“The Father and the Son are at one in their method of working, since the Son is employed upon that work which the Father has done up to now. First recognize that the Son can do nothing of Himself, except what He sees the Father do. Here His birth is revealed; because of it, He can do nothing of Himself till He sees it being done. He is begotten, therefore He can do nothing of Himself; He has no power of initiation, and therefore He must have been born. But the fact that He can see the Father’s works proves that He has the comprehension which belongs to the conscious Possessor of Divinity.”

“Next, note that He does, in fact, possess this true Divine nature; for whatever things the Father does, these also the Son does likewise. Having seen Him endowed with the powers of that nature, note how this results in unity, how one nature dwells in the Two; that all men may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. Don’t let reflection on this unity entangle you in the delusion of a solitary and self-contained God; the mystery of the faith states, ‘He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him’ (John 5:23). The rage and cunning of heresy may do their worst; our position is impregnable. He is the Son, because He can do nothing of Himself; He is God, because, whatever the Father does, He does the same. They two are One, because He is equal in honor to the Father and does the very same works; He is not the Father, because He is sent. Great is the wealth of mysterious truth contained in this one doctrine of the birth! It embraces His name, His nature, His power, His self-revelation; for everything conveyed to Him in His birth must be contained in that nature from which His birth is derived.”

Hilary also stated¹³ that Jesus’ challenge to the Pharisees revealed one of the mysteries of the Faith. His being able to do the Father’s works demonstrates His Divinity even if His Divinity is cloaked by His human form. The fact that the Father could beget Omnipotence, and not be severed from that Omnipotence, is a heightening of the glory of the Father.

“God the Only-begotten has summed up for us, in His own words, the whole revealed mystery of the faith. When He had given His answer to the charge that He, being a man, made Himself God, He determined to show that His

¹² Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VII, 21.

¹³ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VII, 26.

words, I and the Father are One (John 10:30), are a clear and necessary conclusion. 'Do you say, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him' (John 10:36-38). Heresy perpetrates a willful assertion of unbelief and deliberate shamelessness. They who contradict this take pride in foolishness and are dead to the faith; it is not ignorance, but madness, to contradict this."

"The Lord had said, I and the Father are One; the mystery of His birth, which He revealed, was the unity in nature of Father and Son. We are not to believe His assertion that He is the Son of God, unless He does His Father's works. The proof that He is God's Son is that He does the works which belong to the Father's nature."

"No creature is equal to or like God; no nature external to His is comparable in might with Him; it is only the Son, born from the Father, Whom we can without blasphemy liken and equal to Him. If any being, not born from God's self, can be discovered that is like Him and equal to Him in power, then God, in admitting a partner to share His throne, forfeits His pre-eminence. God is not One, if a second, indistinguishable from Himself, has arisen. On the other hand, there is no insult in making His own true Son His equal. That which is like Him is His own; that which is compared with Him is born from Himself; the Power that can do His own works is not external to Him. It is an actual heightening of His glory, that He has begotten Omnipotence, and yet not severed that Omnipotent nature from Himself."

"The Son performs the Father's works, and on that ground demands that we should believe that He is God's Son. This is not arrogance; for He bases it upon His works, and asks us to examine them. He bears witness that these works are not His own, but His Father's. He would not have our thoughts distracted by the splendor of the deeds from the evidence for His birth. Because the Jews could not penetrate the mystery of the Body which He had taken, the Humanity born of Mary, and recognize the Son of God, He appeals to His deeds for confirmation of His right to the Name. First, He would not have them believe that He is the Son of God, except on the evidence of God's works, which He does. Next, if He does the works, yet seems unworthy, in His bodily humility, to bear the Divine Name, He demands that they shall believe the works. Why should the mystery of His human birth hinder our recognition of His birth as God, when He that is Divinely born fulfills every Divine task by the Manhood which He has assumed? If we believe not the Man, for the works' sake, when He tells us that He is the Son of God, let us believe the works when they, which are beyond a doubt the works of God, are clearly done by the Son of God. For the Son of God possesses, by virtue of His birth, everything that is God's; therefore the Son's work is the Father's work."

Christ Chooses to Do the Work of the Father

Christ's relation to the Father is not one of slavish obedience, but one of equality due to the Unity of the Godhead. Christ chooses to do the Will of the Father, not out of compulsion, but

out of free will. He is not separated from the Father, but is like a ray of light that emanates from the Father.

Hilary of Poitiers stated¹⁴ that when we hear and see the teaching and work of the Son, we are hearing and seeing the work of the Father. While Christ has free will, He chooses to do the will of the Father because of the Unity of the Godhead. Doing of one's own will is more than simply obeying; if the Son was merely obeying, it would imply that He was not equal to the Father. But because He does this from His own free will, it shows His equality with the Father.

“He that has heard from the Father, comes to the Son; and he that has heard the teaching of the Son, has heard the teaching of the Father's nature, for its properties are revealed in the Son. When we hear the Son teaching, we must understand that we are hearing the teaching of the Father. No one has seen the Father, yet he who comes to the Son, hears and learns from the Father. It is clear, therefore, that the Father teaches through the words of the Son, and, though seen of no one, speaks to us in the revelation of the Son; the Son, by virtue of His perfect birth, possesses all the properties of His Father's nature. The Only-begotten God, desiring to testify of the Father's authority, yet instilling His own unity with the Father's nature, does not cast out those who are given to Him of the Father, or work His own will instead of the will of Him that sent Him. In order that He may reveal Him Who sent Him, and Himself the Sent, under the aspect of one indistinguishable nature, He shows all that He wills, says, and does, to be the will and works of the Father.”

“Christ proves that His will is free by the words, ‘As the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will’ (John 5:21). When the equality of Father and Son in power and honor is indicated, then the freedom of the Son's will is made clear; when Their unity is demonstrated, His conformity to the Father's will is signified, for what the Father wills, the Son does. But to do is something more than to obey a will; obeying would imply external necessity, while to do another's will requires unity with him, being an act of volition. In doing the will of the Father, the Son teaches that through the identity of Their nature, His will is the same in nature with the Father's, since all that He does is the Father's will. The Son plainly wills all that the Father wills, for wills of the same nature cannot dissent from one another. It is the will of the Father which is revealed in the words, ‘This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day’ (John 6:40). Listen now, whether the will of the Son is discordant with the Father's, when He says, ‘Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am’ (John 17:24). Here is no doubt that the Son wills; for while the Father wills that those who believe in the Son should have eternal life, the Son wills that the believer should be where He is. Is it not eternal life to dwell together with Christ? He grants to the believer in Him all perfection of blessing when He says, ‘No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him’ (Matthew 11:27). Has He not freedom of will, when He wills to impart to us the knowledge of the Father's mystery? Is not His will so free that He can bestow on whom He will the knowledge of Himself and His

¹⁴ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IX, 49-51.

Father? Thus Father and Son are clearly joint Possessors of a common nature through birth; for the Son is free of will, but what He does willingly is an act of the Father's will."

"He who has not grasped the clear truths of the faith, obviously cannot have an understanding of its mysteries. Because he doesn't have the teaching of the Gospel he is an alien to the hope of the Gospel. We must confess the Father to be in the Son and the Son in the Father, by unity of nature, by might of power, as equal in honor as Begetter and Begotten."

Tertullian took exception¹⁵ to the heresy of Praxeas, who stated that Christ's coming from the Father indicates His separation from the Father. Instead it is like a ray's procession from the sun. Christ is so completely known and loved by the Father that He laid down His life at the Father's request as part of His work.

"Some persons seize the opportunity afforded them in the words, 'I proceeded forth and came from God' (John 8:42) to put forward their heresy of His separation. But His coming from God is like the ray's procession from the sun, and the river's procession from the fountain, and the tree's procession from the seed. 'I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father' (John 8:49); again, 'If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word' (John 8:54-55). But when He goes on to say, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad' (John 8:56), He certainly proves that it was not the Father that appeared to Abraham, but the Son. In like manner He declares, in the case of the man born blind, 'that He must do the works of the Father, Who had sent Him' (John 9:4). After He had given the man sight, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' (John 9:35) Then, upon the man's inquiring who He was, He proceeded to reveal Himself to him, as that Son of God whom He had announced to him as the right object of his faith. Later He declared that He was known by the Father, and the Father by Him (John 10:15). He added that He was so wholly loved by the Father, that He was laying down His life, because He had received this commandment from the Father (John 10:15-18). He was asked by the Jews if He were the Christ (John 10:24). This means, of course, the Christ of God; for to this day the Jews expect not the Father Himself, but the Christ of God, it being nowhere said that the Father will come as the Christ. Jesus said to them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me' (John 10:25). They witness of that same thing of which they were making inquiry: whether He were the Christ of God."

The Light That Enlightens Every Man

Jesus had said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4-5).

¹⁵ Tertullian, Against Praxeas, II, vii, 22.

Light and enlightenment are an often recurring theme throughout the Scripture, especially the New Testament concerning Christ. While Christ is referred to in terms of Light versus darkness, so are the saints. John the Baptist was ordained to introduce this Light.

Just before healing the man born blind, Jesus said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). He also said, “This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:19-21). Also, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:35-36). The end result of the Light is the City of Light: “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. The nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light. The kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it” (Revelation 21:23-24).

But yet Jesus also said that the Church is the light of the world. “No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lamp stand, that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light” (Luke 11:33-36). Also, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7). And also, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made clear by the light, for whatever makes clear is light. Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light’” (Ephesians 5:8-14).

John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Light and gave light himself, as his father prophesied, “You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:76-79). John the Baptist “came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light” (John 1:7-8). “He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35).

John Chrysostom stated¹⁶ that Christ's mission was to forgive sins and to attract people to the Light. Those who desired pardon responded to the Light. But there are always those who voluntarily choose wickedness and will do so until their last breath. If they approach the Light, they feel exposed because of their behavior; therefore they stay away because they love their sin. This behavior becomes the theme of this Gospel Reading as it develops.

“The Lord said, ‘And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’ (John 3:19). What He said is this, ‘they will be punished, because they would not leave the darkness, and come to the light’. He goes on to deprive them of all excuse for the future: ‘Had I come to punish their deeds, they might have been able to say, ‘this is why we stayed away from you’. But now I came to free them from darkness, and to bring them to the Light; who then could pity someone who will not come from darkness into Light? When those in darkness have no charge to bring against us for anything we did to them, but have received ten thousand benefits, it is incredible that they still stay away from us. This charge He has brought in another place, where He said, ‘They hated Me without a cause’ (John 15:25); and again, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin’ (John 15:22). He who in the absence of light sits in darkness, may perhaps receive pardon; but one who after it has come continues with the darkness, produces a certain proof of a perverse disposition against himself. Next, His assertion would seem incredible to most, for no one would prefer ‘darkness to light’; therefore He adds the cause of such a feeling in them: ‘Because their deeds were evil! Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed’ (John 3:19-20).

“Christ did not come to judge, but to pardon and forgive transgressions, and to grant salvation through faith. Why then did they flee? Had He come and sat in His Judgment Seat, what He said might have seemed reasonable; for he that is conscious of evil deeds, tends to run from his judge. But, on the contrary, those who have transgressed run to one who is pardoning. If He came to pardon, those would naturally most hasten to Him who were conscious of many transgressions; and this was the case with many, for publicans and prostitutes ate with Jesus. What was He referring to then? He said this of those who always choose to remain in wickedness. He came, that He might forgive men's former sins, and secure them against those to come; but there are some who are so powerless for godliness, that they desire to continue with wickedness till their last breath, and never cease from it. ‘Since the profession of Christianity requires right doctrine and a sound conversation, they fear to come over to us, because they don't like to show a righteous life. No one would blame him that lives in heathenism, because with gods such as he has, and with rites as foul and ridiculous as his gods, his actions suit his doctrines. But those who belong to the True God, if they live a careless life, have all men to call them to account. So greatly do even the enemies of Christianity admire the truth’. Observe, then, how exactly John lays down what He said. His expression is not ‘He that has done evil doesn't come to the light’, but ‘he that always does it, always desires to roll in the mire of sin. He will not subject himself to My Laws, but chooses to stay outside, to commit fornication without fear, and to do all other forbidden things. If he comes to Me,

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXVIII, 2.

he becomes exposed as a thief in the light, and therefore he avoids My dominion'. For instance, even now one may hear many heathen say that 'they cannot come to our faith, because they cannot abandon drunkenness, fornication, and the other disorders'".

Chrysostom also pointed out¹⁷ that Christ chose to heal the eyes of this blind man to illumine his soul. The eyes are the most important of the senses and are the guide for the body.

"Of our members the most honorable is the eye. This is the reason why Christ fashioned the eyes in the way that He did. Though a small member in size, yet it is more necessary than any part of the body. This Paul showed when he said, 'If the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?' (1 Corinthians 12:16). Everything that is in us is a revelation of the wisdom of God, but much more the eye; this is what guides the whole body and gives beauty to it all; this is the light of all the limbs. What the sun is in the world, that the eye is in the body; quench the sun, and you destroy and confound all things; quench the eyes, and the feet, the hands are useless and need to be guided. When these are disabled, even knowledge is gone, since by means of these we know God. 'The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made' (Romans 1:20). The eye is not only a lamp to the body (Matthew 6:22), but beyond the body to the soul also. It is established as in a royal fortress, presiding over the other senses."

Chrysostom further stated¹⁸ that the "day" during which Christ works is this present age. In the age to come, faith will not be needed since everyone will see everything. The blind man could have reacted with little faith like Naaman reacted to Elisha, but he didn't. He was truly worthy of being healed.

"The words, 'I must work while it is day' (John 9:4), leads to an important conclusion. 'While it is day, while men may believe on Me, while this life lasts, I must work', the Lord says. 'The night comes', that is, the future, 'when no man can work'".

"Jesus didn't say, 'when I cannot work', but, 'when no man can work'; that is, when there is no longer faith, labor, or repentance. To show that He called faith, a 'work', notice that when they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?', He replied, 'This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent' (John 6:28). How then can no man work this work in the future world? Because there faith doesn't exist, but everyone, willingly, or unwillingly, submits."

"Regarding faith, though the blind man didn't come to Christ (instead Christ came to him), it is clear from what follows, from his courage, from his faith (1) that the man was worthy to be healed, (2) that had he seen he would have believed and come to Christ, and (3) that had he heard from anyone that Christ was present, he would have responded. The blind man could have responded just as Naaman spoke to Elisha; he was commanded to go wash in the Jordan, but didn't believe, and this too when there was such a fame abroad concerning Elisha

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 2.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 2.

(2 Kings 5:11). But the blind man believed and didn't contradict. He didn't reason with himself, saying, 'What is this? Why should He put on clay? This will blind me more; who ever recovered sight like this?' He used no such reasoning. Do you see his steadfast faith and zeal?"

"Jesus shows that even after the Crucifixion He would care for the ungodly, and bring many to Himself. For 'it is yet day'! But after that, at the close of this age, He entirely cuts them off."

Gregory of Nyssa, addressing virginity as a calling, stated¹⁹ that we can rise above the petty ambitions of this life by the help of the Holy Spirit. In this way we can shine like the sun and reflect the Light of God in our daily lives.

"How can anyone fly up into the heavens, who has not the wings of heaven and is not already buoyant by reason of a heavenly calling? There is but one vehicle on which man's soul can mount into the heavens, i.e., the likeness in himself to the descending Dove, whose wings David also longed for (Psalm 55:6-8). This is the allegorical name used in Scripture for the power of the Holy Spirit; either because not a drop of gall is found in that bird, or because it cannot bear any noxious smell. It is good to keep away from all bitterness and all the noxious effects of the flesh, and raise ourselves on these wings above all low earthly ambitions. If we can do this, we will find that which is alone worth loving, and become as beautiful as the Beauty which he has touched and entered. He will be made bright and luminous himself in the communion of the real Light. The mind of man leaves this murky world, and under the guidance of the spirit becomes pure and luminous in contact with the true Purity. In such an atmosphere it emits light itself, and is so filled with radiance, that it becomes itself a Light, according to the promise of our Lord that 'the righteous should shine forth as the sun' (Matthew 13:43). We see this in this life in the case of a mirror, or a sheet of water, or any smooth surface that can reflect the light. When they receive the sunbeam they beam themselves; but they would not do this if any stain marred their pure and shining surface. We shall become then as the light, in our nearness to Christ's true light, if we leave this dark atmosphere of the earth and dwell above. We shall be light, as our Lord said to His disciples, if the true Light that shines in the dark comes down to us; unless, that is, any foulness of sin, spreading over our hearts, dims the brightness of our light. We can be changed into something better than ourselves."

The Clay is Like the Cross

To demonstrate what He had been saying, Jesus first spit on the ground, made clay with His spit and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the mud. In doing so, Jesus rendered the blind man unclean (Leviticus 15:8, Numbers 12:14). To become clean again according to the Mosaic Law, the person who made contact with another's body fluids (like spit) was required to bathe and wash his clothes. This the blind man did and came back seeing (John 9:7).

John Chrysostom compared²⁰ the Cross to the clay Jesus used to heal the man born blind. Just as the clay increased his blindness, yet still brought him eyesight, so the Cross, an

¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity", 11, in Ascetic and Moral Works.

instrument of death, brings life to the world. This attracts people to Christ even though it is the exact opposite of what they were looking for.

“The Greeks demand of us a rhetorical style, and subtle reasoning, where weakness to the Greeks is foolishness. We not only fail in producing what they demand, but also produce the opposite of their demand; for the Cross not only has no appearance of being a sign sought out by reasoning, but the absence of a sign. It is not merely no proof of power, but a conviction of weakness; not merely no display of wisdom, but a suggestion of stupidity. When those who seek signs and wisdom not only don’t receive the things which they ask for, but even hear the contrary to what they desire, and then by means of these contraries are persuaded to believe; the power of Him that is preached can be seen as extraordinary. This is like someone riding out a storm on the ocean and longing for a safe harbor, where you showed him not a harbor but another wilder portion of the sea, and made him follow with thankfulness. It’s also like a physician who comes across a man that was badly burned and in need of urgent attention, and who promises to cure him not with soothing ointment, but by burning him again! This is a result of great power indeed. So also the Apostles prevailed, not simply without a sign, but even by a thing which seemed contrary to all the known signs. Christ did this in the case of the man born blind. When He healed him, He took away the blindness by a thing that increased the blindness; i.e. he put on clay (John 9:6). Just as then by means of clay He healed the blind man, so also by means of the Cross He brought the world to Himself. That certainly was adding an offense, not taking an offense away. By means of the prophets again with a small piece of wood He raised up iron²¹ from the bottom (2 Kings 6:5-7). In like manner also with the Cross He has drawn the world to Himself. It is proof of great power and wisdom, to convince by means of the things which speak directly against us. Thus the Cross seems to be matter of offense; and yet far from offending, it even attracts.”

Cyril of Jerusalem mentioned²² four truly marvelous works that Jesus performed, but these all pale compared to the marvel of the Cross. Each of these miracles was unexpected: clay to restore eyesight, waiting two days to raise Lazarus, five loaves to feed 5000, etc. But the Cross brings us back to Paradise.

“The Church’s greatest cause of all glorying is in the Cross; knowing this, Paul says, ‘God forbid that I should glory, except in the Cross of Christ’ (Galatians 6:14). Wondrous indeed it was that one who was blind from his birth should receive sight in Siloam; but what is this compared with the blind of the whole world? A great thing it was for Lazarus to rise again on the fourth day; but the grace extended to him alone, and what was it compared with the dead in sins throughout the world? Marvelous it was that five loaves should provide food for the five thousand; but what is that to those who are famishing in ignorance through the world? It was marvelous that she should have been freed, who had been bound by Satan eighteen years; yet what is this to all of us, who were bound in the chains of our sins? The glory of the Cross led those who were blind

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 5.

²¹ An iron ax head accidentally fell into the water and was buried in the mud at the bottom. Elisha cut off a stick, threw it into the water, and made the iron ax head float.

²² Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 1-2.

through ignorance into light, freed all who were held by sin, and ransomed the whole world of mankind.”

“Don’t wonder that the whole world was ransomed; for it was no mere man, but the only-begotten Son of God, who died on its behalf. One man’s sin, Adam’s, had power to bring death to the world; how shall not life much rather reign by the righteousness of the One? (Romans 5:17-18) Because of the tree of food they were then cast out of Paradise; shall not believers now more easily enter into Paradise because of the Tree of Jesus? If the first man formed out of the earth brought in universal death, shall not He who formed him out of the earth bring in eternal life? If Phinehas, when he grew zealous and slew the evil-doer, kept the wrath of God at a distance (Numbers 25:7-11), shall not Jesus, who gave up Himself for a ransom, put away the wrath which is against mankind?”

Ephraim the Syrian noted²³ how the healing of the man born blind fits into the greater context of Jesus’ miracles. Jesus was a wandering physician carrying his medicines with Him. To us He has given the greatest of these medicines: His Body and Blood.

“Listen and be comforted, beloved, how merciful God is. To the sinful woman He forgave her offenses; He upheld her when she was afflicted. With clay He opened the eyes of the blind, so that the eyeballs beheld the light (John 9:6). To the paralyzed He granted healing, who arose and walked and carried his bed (Matthew 9:2). To us He has given the pearls: His holy Body and Blood. He brought His medicines secretly; and with them He heals openly. He wandered around in the land of Judea, like a physician, carrying his medicines. Simon invited Him to the feast at his house. The sinful woman rejoiced when she heard that He was feasting in Simon’s house (Luke 7:36-37); her thoughts gathered together like the sea, and like the waves her love surged. She saw the Sea of Grace, how it had forced itself into one place; and she resolved to go and drown all her wickedness in its waves.”

Healing at Siloam

The Pool of Siloam where Jesus told the blind man to wash, was the drinking water supply for Jerusalem and was not used for washing sheep like the Pool of Bethesda in the Gospel lesson two weeks ago (John 5:1-15). The source of supply of the Pool of Siloam (Hebrew “Shiloah”) was a spring over a quarter mile away and outside the city walls. An underground aqueduct was cut through solid rock to bring the overflow from the spring within the city walls. This was done around the time of David or Solomon, but the actual spring outside the walls was not sealed off with masonry until 250 to 300 years later during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:2-4). The Pool itself was about 50 feet x 20 feet x 19 feet deep.

Chrysostom stated²⁴ that the blind man walking to the pool of Siloam must have created quite a spectacle and created many witnesses. As he departed, they recognized him as the blind beggar (John 9:8), but must have thought it strange that he had the clay spread on his eyes. Many people had followed him to see what in the world he was doing. Since the distance from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam was about 1/3 mile, many people were witnesses to this

²³ Ephraim the Syrian, “On the Sinful Woman”, Three Homilies, II, 1.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVII, 1.

spectacle of a blind man with clay on his eyes trying to negotiate his way. Coming back seeing, however, Chrysostom stated that it was not easy to recognize a blind man who had recovered sight; it was no longer a spectacle because he walked differently.

Chrysostom also compared²⁵ the healing of the blind man to the gushing of water from the Rock in the wilderness. Both were an unexplainable mystery. When the blind man was asked later how Jesus did this, all he could relate was what happened; he could not describe how it happened.

“Christ also healed Israel in the desert, where, ‘They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ’ (1 Corinthians 10:4). As then Christ was the spiritual Rock, so also He was the spiritual Siloam. To me also the sudden coming in of the water in the desert seems to hint a mystery: the unlooked-for nature of His appearance, beyond all expectation. But observe the mind of the blind man, obedient in everything. He didn’t say, ‘If it is really the clay or the spit which gives me eyes, why do I need Siloam? Or if I need Siloam, what is the need of the clay? Why did he anoint me? Why did He ask me to wash?’ But he entertained no such thoughts; he held himself prepared for one thing only, to obey in all things Him who gave the command and nothing that was done offended him. If anyone asked, ‘How then did he recover his sight, when he had removed the clay?’ he will hear no other answer from us than that we don’t know the manner. What wonder if we don’t know the answer, since not even the Evangelist John knew, or the man that was healed? What had been done he knew, but the manner of doing it he could not comprehend. So when he was asked he said, that ‘He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see’ (); but how this took place he cannot tell them, though they ask ten thousand times.”

Demonstration of the Creation of Man

Just prior to the events at the Pool of Siloam, Jesus had just come from a confrontation with the Jewish leaders that ended with their picking up stones to stone Him to death for claiming equality with the Father (John 8:58-59). Jesus went straight from there to the man born blind, intentionally, to demonstrate what He had been saying, that He is equal with the Father.

In the Beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the Father spoke to the Son, “Let there be light!” (Genesis 1:3), and the Son created light as the Holy Spirit moved over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2). “All things were made through the Son, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:3). Christ originally “formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7); so now He repeats the process on the blind man’s eyes.

Irenaeus emphasized²⁶ that the healing of the man blind from birth was a demonstration of the Word’s operation just like at the Creation. The process is the same: He started with clay and formed man, and continues to do this for everyone in the womb.

“The Lord plainly revealed Himself and the Father to His disciples, lest they might seek another God besides Him who formed man. He also healed by a

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVII, 1.

²⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, xv, 2-3.

word all the others who were in a weak condition because of sin, where He said, 'Behold, you are made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you' (John 5:14). He pointing out by this, that, because of the sin of disobedience, infirmities have come upon men."

"To that man, who had been blind from his birth, He gave sight, not by means of a word, but by an outward action. He did this to show the hand of God, which at the beginning had molded man. Therefore when His disciples asked Him for what cause the man had been born blind, whether for his own or his parents' fault, He replied, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him' (John 9:3). Now the work of God is the fashioning of man. He made man by a kind of process; 'The Lord took clay from the earth, and formed man' (Genesis 2:7). Therefore the Lord spit on the ground and made clay, and smeared it on the eyes, pointing out the original fashioning of man, how it was done, and showing the hand of God to those who can understand by what hand man was formed out of the dust. That which the Craftsman, the Word, had omitted to form in the womb, [i.e. the blind man's eyes], He then supplied in public, that the works of God might be clear in him. We do not need to seek out another hand by which man was fashioned, nor another Father. This hand of God, which formed us at the beginning, and which forms us in the womb, has now sought us out, who were lost, winning back His own, and taking up the lost sheep upon His shoulders, and with joy restoring it to the fold of life."

"That the Word of God forms us in the womb, He says, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the Gentiles' (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul, too, says, 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, that I might declare Him among the nations' (Galatians 1:15-16). As we are formed in the womb by the Word, this same Word formed the visual power in him who had been blind from his birth. He showed openly who it is that fashions us in secret, since the Word Himself had been made clear to men. He declared the original formation of Adam, and the manner in which he was created, and by what hand he was fashioned, indicating the whole from a part. For the Lord, who formed the visual powers, is He who made the whole man, carrying out the will of the Father. Man, needed the laver of regeneration. Therefore the Lord said to the blind man, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (John 9:7) thus restoring to him that regeneration which takes place by means of the laver. For this reason when he was washed, he came back seeing, that he might both know Him who had fashioned him, and that man might learn to know Him who has conferred life on him."

Athanasius of Alexandria noted²⁷ from Christ's miracles that any unbiased observer can see that He is God and Master of all creation. In everything He did, the creation is subject to Him as to the Power of God.

"The Word, though invisible, is known through the works of creation. Having become man, His works show that He, Who can do these is not man, but the Power and Word of God."

"His driving out evil spirits is not of man, but of God. Who that saw Him healing diseases, can still think Him man and not God? He cleansed lepers, made

²⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, XVIII, 3-6.

lame men to walk, opened the hearing of deaf men, made blind men to see again, and drove away from men all diseases. Even the most ordinary observer can see His Godhead. He gave back what was deficient to men who were born lacking it. Who that saw Him open the eyes of the man blind from his birth, would have failed to perceive that the nature of men was subject to Him, and that He was its Craftsman and Maker? He that gave back that, which the man never had from his birth, must be the Lord also of men's natural birth."

"When He was descending to us, He fashioned His body for Himself from a Virgin, thus giving to everyone no small proof of His Godhead, in that He, Who formed this is also Maker of everything else as well. Who can see a body coming from a Virgin alone without man, and fail to infer that He Who appears in it is Maker and Lord of other bodies also?"

"Who can see the substance of water changed into wine and fail to perceive that He Who did this is Lord and Creator of all water? In this vein He walked on the sea as its Master as on dry land to give evidence to those that saw it of His lordship over all things. In feeding so vast a multitude on little, by Himself He yielded abundance, so that from five loaves five thousand had enough, and had so much left over. He showed Himself to be the Lord, Whose Providence is over all things."

The Blindness of the Pharisees

When the formerly blind man came back seeing, his neighbors and acquaintances were dismayed and couldn't believe it was the same person (John 9:8-9). When he explained what happened, they took him to the Pharisees (John 9:10-13). The Pharisees asked him to repeat his story, which he did (John 9:15).

A division among the Pharisees was created, however. One group said, "This man (Jesus) is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath" (John 9:16). The other group, who were in the minority and included Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel, were more perceptive and said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" They had witnessed the Creator create a blind man's eyes all over again! Nicodemus had said the same thing during his secret meeting with Jesus two years earlier. "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). And this was one of the events that led Nicodemus and Joseph to perform the burial rite for Jesus a few months later (John 19:38-39).

Athanasius of Alexandria compared²⁸ the Arians to the Pharisees of Jesus' day. When some of the saints tried to care for the poor, the Arians beat the poor widows and brought the saints to trial for acts of kindness.

"He who showed mercy was accused, and he who had received a benefit was beaten; and they wished rather that a poor man should suffer hunger, than that he who was willing to show mercy should give to him. Such sentiments these modern Jews, for such they are, have learned from the Jews of old, who when they saw him who had been blind from his birth recover his sight, and him who had been a long time paralyzed made whole, accused the Lord who had bestowed

²⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, History of the Arians, VII, 61.

these benefits upon them, and judged them to be transgressors who had experienced His goodness.”

Ambrose of Milan also compared the Arians to the Pharisees. He wrote²⁹ to his sister about the relics of two martyrs and how they were treated by the Arians. A butcher named Severus had lost his eyesight, and had to give up his trade, but his eyesight was restored by touching the hem of the robe that covered the relics of the two martyrs. Like the Jewish leaders, the Arians denied that Severus had ever been blind.

“The Arians hate your honoring the martyrs, and go so far in their madness as to deny the merits of the martyrs, whose deeds even the evil spirits confess. Small wonder, since the confession of the devil is often easier to endure than the faithlessness of unbelievers. For example, the Gadarene demon said, ‘Jesus, Son of the living God, why have You come to torment us before the time?’ (Matthew 8:29) On the other hand, when the Jews heard the same thing, they denied Him to be the Son of God (Mark 3:11, Luke 4:41). At this time you have heard³⁰ the demons crying out, and confessing to the martyrs that they cannot bear their sufferings, saying, ‘Why have you come to torment us so severely?’ But the Arians say, ‘These are not martyrs, and they cannot torment demons or deliver anyone’, while the benefits of the martyrs are declared by the restoring of those healed.

The Arians deny that Severus received sight, but he confirms that he was healed. He says, ‘I who could not see now see. I ceased to be blind’ and he proves it. The Arians deny the benefit, who are unable to deny the fact. The man calls as evidence those persons by whose kindness he was supported; he brings forward those as able to confirm the truth of his visitation that he had as witnesses of his blindness. He declares how his sight was restored.

Is not this like the man born blind? The Jews, when they saw the gift of healing in the blind man, called for the testimony of his parents, ‘How does your son see?’ (John 9:19) Both Severus and the man born blind said, ‘Whereas I was blind, now I see’. The obstinacy of the Arians is more hateful than that of the Jews; the latter, when they doubted, at least asked his parents; the Arians inquire in secret and deny in public, incredulous not as to the work, but as to its Author.

This Man Is Not of God

After the blind man was healed at the Pool of Siloam, the people who saw him “brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes” (John 9:14-15). The Pharisees reacted in three ways:

1. They claimed that He was a Samaritan who had a demon.
2. They claimed that He broke the Sabbath Laws in healing the blind man.
3. They denied that the miracle took place at all.

²⁹ Ambrose of Milan, Letters, XXII, 16-19.

³⁰ This event undoubtedly took place privately and not on a public occasion.

They Claimed He Was a Samaritan Who Had a Demon

In the summer 28 AD, “they brought to Jesus a man, mute and demon-possessed. When Jesus cast the demon out of the man, the mute spoke. The multitudes marveled, saying, ‘It was never seen like this in Israel!’ But the Pharisees said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons’” (Matthew 9:32-34, Luke 11:14-15). Mark adds that Jesus’ own people³¹ tried to restrain Him, thinking that He was insane (Mark 3:21).

In the fall of 29 AD, the same accusation came up at three occasions. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus taught in the Temple and accused the religious leaders of trying to kill Him. They retorted back that He had a demon (John 7:14-20). A little later, Jesus was debating with the Pharisees; again He accused them of trying to kill Him (John 8:37), and said that they were of their father the devil (John 8:44). Their reply was, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:48) Finally, shortly after the miracle of the man born blind, there was a division among the Jewish leaders. “Many of them said, ‘He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?’ Others, remembering the miracle said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” (John 10:20-21).

While all this was going on in 28-29 AD, a few miles away in Samaria, Simon Magus was performing his sorcery, creating the illusion of many miracles. For example, Clement of Rome wrote³² of some of these “miracles” that the people of Samaria witnessed.

“He makes statues walk, and he rolls himself on the fire, and is not burned; and sometimes he flies. He makes loaves of bread out of stones; he becomes a serpent; he transforms himself into a goat; he becomes two-faced. He changes himself into gold; he opens locked gates; he melts iron. At banquets he produces images of all manner of forms. In his house he makes dishes fly through the air by themselves to wait on him. I wondered when I heard them say this; but many bore witness that they had been present, and had seen such things”.

Simon astonished the people of Samaria with his sorcery, and they all listened to him. The effect was that they all referred to Simon saying, “This man is the great power of God” (Acts 8:9-10). This is an exact counterfeit of what Jesus was doing in Judea. Since everyone knew what was going on in Samaria, it is just natural that the Jewish leaders would think that Jesus was just another sorcerer like Simon.

John Chrysostom noted³³ the continuous hostility that Jesus experienced. Some called Him a demon-possessed Samaritan; others, a deceiver and others, a sorcerer. In addition they called Him an adversary of God, a drunkard, and a friend of the depraved. Yet He exhibited the Power of God in everything He did. All this fits a pattern, since Simon Magus was doing exactly what they accused Jesus of doing just a few miles away in Samaria. Chrysostom said:

³¹ These people may have included some of Jesus’ stepbrothers or some more distant relatives. Jude (aka Lebbaeus) had already been chosen as one of the Twelve Apostles, and was about to be sent out two by two (Matthew 10:1-5) James had been devoted to Jesus from the time of His birth. Joseph had already been chosen as one of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-20).

³² Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 32-34, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

³³ John Chrysostom, Letters to Olympias, I, 3.

“When Jesus had returned from Egypt and was grown up, war flamed up against him on every side. First the disciples of John were envious of Him and tried to slander Him³⁴, although John himself behaved reverently to Him. They said, ‘He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified -- behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!’ (John 3:26). These were the words of men who were already irritated, and consumed by that passion. For the same reason one of the disciples who said these things disputed with a certain Jew and raised a contentious argument about purifying, comparing one kind of baptism with another, the baptism of John with that of the disciples of Christ. ‘Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew about purification’ (John 3:25). When He began to work miracles, how many slanderers He had! Some called Him a Samaritan and demoniac saying ‘You are a Samaritan and have a demon’ (John 8:48). Others called Him ‘a deceiver’, saying ‘This man is not of God but deceives the people’ (John 7:12). Others called Him ‘a sorcerer’ saying ‘He casts out demons through Beelzebub the prince of the Demons’ (Luke 11:15). They continually said these things against Him and called Him an adversary of God, a gluttonous and greedy man, and a drunkard, and a friend of the wicked and depraved. Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, Look, a glutton and a wino, a friend of tax collectors and harlots!’ (Luke 7:34) When he was conversing with the harlot, they called Him a false prophet. ‘For had He been a prophet’, one said, ‘He would know what manner of woman this is who is touching Him’ (Luke 7:39). In fact every day they sharpened their teeth against Him. Not only did the Jews thus oppose Him, but even those who were reputed to be his brethren were not sincerely attached to Him; even out of his own family opposition flamed up against Him. Notice how they also were perverted, from the remark ‘for even His brothers believe in Him’” (John 7:5).

On another occasion, Jesus healed a paralytic (actually a quadriplegic) who was carried by four men and let down to Jesus through a hole in the roof. First Jesus forgave the quadriplegic his sins (Mark 2:4-5) – indicating that there was evidence of some faith on the part of the crippled man as well as his four friends. Next Jesus read the thoughts of the Scribes present, and responded to their objections that Jesus made Himself out to be God (Mark 2:7-8). To prove that this was true, Jesus proceeded to heal the quadriplegic, so that he carried his own pallet out of the room afterward (Mark 2:10-12).

While the multitudes glorified God, who had given such power to men (Matthew 9:8), the Scribes and Pharisees had a similar problem with Jesus doing these works, demonstrating His Deity. John Chrysostom stated³⁵ of this:

“Christ’s flesh was an offense to them, but He did not rebuke them. He proceeded by His works to arouse them, and exalt their thoughts. For the time being, it was no small thing for Him to be thought greater than all men, as having come from God. Had they established these things in their own minds, proceeding logically they would have known that He was God. But they did not retain these things clearly, neither were they able to approach Him. Therefore

³⁴ Simon Magus had been a follower of John the Baptist at one time without divulging the sorcery that he practiced in secret. Simon may have stirred up the other followers of John the Baptist to criticize Jesus.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXIX, 2.

they said, ‘This man is not from God’ (John 9:16). They were continually harping on these things, putting them forward as cloaks for their own passions.’”

He Does Not Keep the Sabbath

A short time before this, Jesus healed the paralytic on the Sabbath (John 5:1-9). Mosaic Law demanded the death penalty for anyone working on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14-16). However, Jesus contended with the Pharisees on several occasions about how the intent or spirit of the Sabbath Laws that He (Jesus) gave Moses on Mt. Sinai was to provide an opportunity for people to do good on the Sabbath (Luke 6:5-11).

Irenaeus pointed out³⁶ that Jesus was conforming exactly to the Law by healing on the Sabbath, and that this was what the Sabbath was for.

“Christ did nothing contrary to the Law when He healed on the Sabbath. For the Law did not prohibit men from being healed on the Sabbath; on the contrary, it even circumcised them on that day, and gave command that service should be performed by the priests for the people. It did not forbid the healing even of dumb animals. Both at Siloam and on frequent other occasions, Christ performed cures on the Sabbath; and for this reason many used to come to Him on the Sabbath. The Law commanded them to abstain from all slavish work, that is, from all grasping after wealth, which is procured by trading and by other worldly business. But it exhorted them to attend to the exercises of the soul, which consist in reflection, and to attend to things that benefit their neighbors. Therefore the Lord reproveth those who unjustly blamed Him for having healed on the Sabbath. He did not void the Law, but fulfilled it, by performing the service of the high priest, propitiating God for men, cleansing lepers, healing the sick, and Himself suffering death. His point was that exiled man might return from condemnation without fear to obtain his own inheritance.”

John Chrysostom noted³⁷ the division among the Jewish leaders (John 9:16) and concluded that more believed than didn’t, but all were reluctant to speak out because of the Pharisees. The result was that the Jewish leaders were more devoid of understanding than the multitude.

“The greater number even of the rulers believed on Him, but didn’t confess Him. Now the multitude was easily overlooked, as being of no great account in their synagogue, but the rulers being more conspicuous had the greater difficulty in speaking boldly. Some were restrained by the love of power; others were restrained by cowardice, and the fear of the multitude. Jesus had said, ‘How can you believe who receive honor from men?’ (John 5:44) Those who were seeking to kill Jesus claimed that they were of God, but that He who healed the blind could not be of God, because He didn’t keep the Sabbath. The others objected that a sinner could not do such miracles. Those seeking to kill Him maliciously kept silence about what had taken place, but brought forward the seeming transgression; for they didn’t say, ‘He heals on the Sabbath day’, but, ‘He doesn’t keep the Sabbath’ (John 9:17). Those objecting, on the other hand,

³⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, viii, 2.

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVII, 2.

replied weakly, for when they ought to have shown that the Sabbath was not broken, they rely only on the miracles; and with reason, for they still thought that He was a man. If they had recognized His Deity, they might have urged in His defense, that He was Lord of the Sabbath, but as yet they didn't see this. None of them dared to say what they wished openly, but only in the way of questioning and doubt, some from not having boldness of speech, others through love of power."

"The division among the rulers (John 9:16) first began among the people, then later included the rulers also. Some said, 'He is a good man'; others said, 'No, but he deceives the people' (John 7:12). The rulers were voider of understanding than the multitude. Because they were divided, they did not exhibit any noble feeling when they saw the Pharisees pressing them. Had they been separated from the Pharisees, they would soon have known the truth."

The Pharisees contended³⁸ that Jesus "can't be from God, since he didn't keep the Sabbath" (John 9:16). John Chrysostom stated that Jesus met them head-on over this issue. Jesus addressed just the lesser issue: "Did He come from God?" The greater issue: "Was He equal to the Father?" would find their acceptance if they could accept the lesser issue.

"Jesus spoke of 'the works which the Father has given Me to finish that bear witness of Me' (John 5:36). Yet Jesus acted with absolute power; but in order to show that He does nothing contrary to the Father, therefore He understated things. Why did He not say, 'The works which the Father has given Me testify that I am equal to the Father?' He established this point elsewhere, when He said, 'Though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him' (John 10:38). In both respects, therefore, the works bore witness to Him, that He was equal to the Father, and that He did nothing contrary to Him. Why then didn't He say so, instead of leaving out His equality and putting forward His obedience? To establish the fact of His obedience was His first object. Although it was a far less thing to have it believed that He came from God, than to have it believed that God was equal with Him. The Prophets came from God also, but they were never referred to as equal with God. Still He took great pains as to the lesser point, knowing that if they admitted this, they would also receive the other afterward."

"Jesus added, 'The Father Himself, who has sent Me, has born witness of Me' (John 5:37). The Father bore witness to Him at the Jordan, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him' (Matthew 3:16). The testimony of John the Baptist was also clear, for they themselves had gone to John, and could not deny it. The testimony from the miracles was in like manner clear, for they had seen them done, and had heard from him who had been healed, and had believed."

The Pharisees Don't Recognize Who Jesus Is

Jesus said to the Pharisees, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind. Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus said to them, 'If

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XL, 3.

you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains” (John 9:39-41).

John Chrysostom spoke³⁹ of the end result of the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus and their refusal to try to recognize the miracle that happened to the blind man. Following Palm Sunday, Jesus spoke the parable of the vineyard to these same Pharisees, where the vineyard tenants (the Pharisees) will be thrown out and the vineyard given to the Gentiles (Matthew 21:33-45), Chrysostom said:

“That they might learn that nothing happens outside of God’s will, but that the Palm Sunday event was highly acceptable, beyond expectation, and amazing every one of the beholders (for indeed the miracle was far beyond words), Jesus added, ‘It is the Lord’s doing’ (Matthew 21:42, Psalm 118:22-23). By the stone He means Himself, and by builders the teachers of the Jews. As Ezekiel said, ‘They have seduced My people, saying, “Peace!” when there is no peace. One builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar. Say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall’ (Ezekiel 13:10-11). But how did they reject Him? By saying, ‘This man is not of God’ (John 9:16); ‘This man deceives the people’ (John 7:12); and again, ‘You are a Samaritan, and have a demon’” (John 8:48).

“That they might know that the penalty is not limited to their being cast out, He added the punishment, saying, ‘Whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder’ (Matthew 21:44). He speaks here of two ways of destruction, one from stumbling and being offended; for this is, ‘Whoever falls on this stone’. The other refers to their capture, calamity, and utter destruction, which also He clearly foretold, saying, ‘It will grind him to powder’. By these words He darkly intimated His own resurrection also.

Chrysostom also stated⁴⁰ that the comments of the Jewish leaders show their disagreement with each other. The first group had said, “This man is not of God”, for breaking the Sabbath, which indicated that they believed that He healed the blind man. The second group had said, “How can a sinner do such miracles?” Chrysostom focused on the second group, who tried to deny the miracle took place at all:

“They now say to the man, ‘What do you say of Him, since He has opened your eyes?’ They didn’t say, ‘What do you say of Him, Who has broken the Sabbath?’ These who speak are not the men who said, ‘This man is not of God’, but those who separated themselves from them, and said, ‘A sinner cannot do such miracles’. Desiring to silence their opponents (the other Jewish leaders), in order that they may not seem to be partisans of Christ, they bring forward the man who had received proof of His power, and question him. Observe now the wisdom of the poor man, who speaks more wisely than them all. First he said, ‘He is a Prophet’ (John 9:17); and didn’t shrink from the judgment of the perverse Jews who spoke against Him.”

“These Jewish leaders did not believe that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they had called his parents’ (John 9:18-21). Observe in

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 2.

⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVIII, 1.

how many ways they attempt to obscure and take away the miracle. But this is the nature of truth, by the very means by which it seems to be attacked by men, by these it becomes stronger; it shines by means of that by which it is obscured. If these things had not taken place, the miracle might have been suspected by the multitude. But now, as if desiring to lay bare the truth, they used every means, and did everything as if they had acted in Christ's behalf. First they attempted to put Him down by examining this mode of cure, saying, 'How did He open your eyes?', that is, 'was it by some sorcery?' In another place, when they had no charge to bring against Him, they tried to insult the mode of the cure, saying, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons'" (Matthew 12:24).

Chrysostom noticed⁴¹ many contradictions in the words of the people and the rulers in Jerusalem. At some times they know who Jesus is and where He is from; at other times they don't. They acted like madmen, and the only thing they looked for is reasons for unbelief.

"Many of those of Jerusalem said, 'Isn't this He, whom they seek to kill? But, look, he speaks boldly, and they say nothing to him' (John 7:25-26). Now why did the Apostle John add, 'those of Jerusalem?' John shows that the common people who had most enjoyed His mighty miracles were more pitiful than any; they had seen the greatest proof of His Godhead by being healed, and yet deferred to the judgment of their corrupt rulers. It was a great proof of this, that furious men, bent on murder, should be quiet all of a sudden, when they had Him in their hands. Not only do they say nothing to Him, but nothing even when He 'speaks boldly'. One who spoke boldly and with complete freedom would naturally have angered them more; but they did nothing. 'Do they know that this is really the Christ?' 'What do you think?' On which account the people said, 'We know where this man is from' (John 7:25-27). What contradiction! The men of Jerusalem do not even follow the opinion of their rulers."

"Earlier they said, 'When the Christ comes, no man knows where He is from' (John 7:27). Yet when the Magi asked, the rulers replied that He should be born in Bethlehem' (Matthew 2:4). Now the rulers said, 'God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't know where He is from' (John 9:29). 'We know where He is from', and 'we don't know where He is from'; observe the words of drunken men. Again, 'Does Christ come out of Galilee? (John 7:41). Is He not of 'the town of Bethlehem?' Their decision is one of madmen! What can be plainer than this contradiction? They only looked for one thing only: a reason not to believe."

John Chrysostom spoke⁴² of Jesus' care even for the obstinate Jewish leaders. Because they refused to see and hear what was going on, He took away their hearing and spoke only in parables. If He had continued speaking plainly, it would only have resulted in their greater condemnation, which He didn't come for.

"Jesus made what He had said more distinct, pointing out, 'Whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, L, 1.

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XLV, 1.

in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matthew 13:12-13).

“If the blindness was physical, it was fit to open their eyes; but because it was a voluntary and self-chosen blindness, therefore He said not simply, ‘They don’t see’, but, ‘seeing, they don’t see’; so that the blindness was because of their own wickedness. They saw demons cast out, and said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons’ (Luke 11:15). They heard Him guiding them to God, and they said, ‘This man is not of God’ (John 9:16). Since then the judgment they pronounced was contrary both to their sight and hearing, therefore, He said, even the hearing will I take away from them. They derive no advantage from it, but rather greater condemnation. They not only disbelieved, but found fault, accused, and laid snares also. However, Jesus didn’t say this openly, for it is not His will to give disgust in accusing them. Therefore even at the beginning He spoke to them very plainly; but because they perverted themselves, thereafter He spoke in parables.”

In late 29 AD, the Jewish leaders gathered around Jesus and asked Him, “How long will you make us doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). This sounds like an honest desire to learn and clarify the situation, but they were continually trying to find some reason to put Him to death because of His words. He had told them that He was the Christ, but they weren’t receptive to hearing that. John Chrysostom commented⁴³:

“Jesus could have replied, ‘Why do you inquire of Me? Often you have called Me a demoniac, a madman, and a Samaritan, and have considered me an enemy of God, and a deceiver. Now you say, If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true; how is it then that you seek to learn from Me, whose witness you reject?’ But He said nothing of the kind, although He knew that they had evil intentions when they made the inquiry. Their surrounding Him and saying, ‘How long do you make us doubt?’, seemed to proceed from a certain desire for learning, but the intention with which they asked the question was deceitful. Jesus didn’t respond to their slander, while they attacked His sayings by finding in them a sense other than that in which they were spoken. They continually proposed questions, desiring to silence Him by means of His sayings. When they could find no fault with His works, they wished to find a handle in His words. Therefore they said, ‘Tell us’; yet He had often told them. He said to the woman of Samaria, ‘I AM speaks to you’ (John 4:26); and to the blind man, ‘You have both seen Him, and it is He that is talking with you’ (John 9:37). He had told them also, if not in the same, at least in other words. Had they been wise, and had they desired to inquire rightly, all they had to do was confess Him by words, since by works He had often proved the point in question. But now observe their perverse temper. When He addressed them, and instructed them by His words, they said, ‘What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You?’ (John 6:30) But when He gives them proof by His works, they said to Him, ‘Are you the Christ? Tell us plainly’ (John 10:24); when the works cry aloud, they seek words, and when the words teach, then they want works, always being contrary. The end showed that they didn’t inquire for the sake of learning.”

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXI, 1.

“Their mode of questioning was full of hatred. Yet He spoke everything openly, always being present at their feasts, and in secret He said nothing; but their words were full of deceit, in order that having drawn Him out, they might again find some handle against Him.”

The Boldness of the Blind Man After Receiving Sight

The arguments and disagreements among the Pharisees were not lost on the formerly blind man. In fact, they began to give him true insight into what really happened. The interchange went like this:

- Some of the Pharisees asked the formerly blind man his opinion of Jesus. He replied, “He is a prophet.”
- These Pharisees then denied the fact that he had been blind in the first place and called his parents as witnesses. This discredited the Pharisees in the eyes of the formerly blind man since he could see that they were suppressing the obvious.
- The parents confirmed their son’s former blindness but hesitated to speak further out of fear.
- The Pharisees called in the formerly blind man again, this time under oath, asking him to deny the miracle ever took place. This indicated that they thought he and his parents were lying and they completely discredited themselves in his eyes. To him they were just trying to stonewall the truth.
- The formerly blind man threw it back in their face, “Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?”
- Infuriated, they reviled him, claiming to be Moses’ disciple and said they didn’t even know where Jesus was from.
- The formerly blind man now saw things clearly and spelled it out to the Pharisees. Following are John Chrysostom’s comments⁴⁴:
 1. This is a marvelous thing; you do not know where Jesus is from, yet He opened my eyes. “A Man, who is not one of the distinguished, noble or illustrious among you, can do such things; so that it is in every way clear that He is God, needing no human help”.
 2. God does not hear sinners, and you acknowledge this; but He does hear true worshippers who do His Will. “Here he not only has cleared Jesus of sin, but declares that He is very pleasing to God, and does His will. Since they called themselves worshipers of God, he added, ‘and does His will’; ‘since’, he said, ‘it is not sufficient to know God; men must also do His will’.
 3. Since the world began, it has been unheard that anyone ever opened the eyes of one born blind. “If now you acknowledge that God doesn’t hear sinners, and this Person has wrought a miracle, and such a miracle as no man has ever done, it is clear that He has surpassed all things in virtue, and that His power is greater than belongs to man.”
 4. If this man (Jesus) were not from God, He could do nothing.
- The Pharisees proceeded to cast him out of the Synagogue, overruling Nicodemus, Joseph and Gamaliel. The formerly blind man was fortunate to get out alive; when the

⁴⁴ Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVIII, 3.

Deacon Stephen did something similar about a year later (Acts 7), Stephen and about 200 others⁴⁵ were stoned to death.

John Chrysostom noted⁴⁶ that an underlying assumption of the Pharisees was that Jesus was a sinner. They said, “We know that this man (Jesus) is a sinner” (John 9:24). They tried to get the formerly blind man to say that also, but he kept playing their own words back to them, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs”? (John 9:16) Yet just a short time earlier, Jesus had spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees and had asked them, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46) This was followed by silence, since they could find no sin in Him. Thus the formerly blind man kept challenging the obstinate blindness of the Pharisees.

Chrysostom also noted⁴⁷ the change in the attitude of the formerly blind man when the Pharisees began to question him a second time. Before he had spoken cautiously in supplying the proof of what he said. After that he spoke confidently and trampled their madness, declaring himself to be Jesus’ disciple.

“The Pharisees inquired again, ‘What did he do to you? How did He open your eyes?’ (John 9:26) Having conquered them already and put them down, he no longer spoke to them submissively. As long as the matter needed inquiry and arguments he spoke guardedly, while he supplied the proof; but when he had conquered and gained a splendid victory, he then took courage, and trampled them.”

“‘I have told you once, and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again?’ (John 9:27) This is bold-speaking of a beggar towards Scribes and Pharisees! So strong is truth, so weak is falsehood. Truth, though she take hold of ordinary men, makes them to appear glorious; falsehood, even though it is with the strong, shows them to be weak! What the formerly blind man said is of this kind, ‘You paid no attention to my words; therefore I will no longer speak or answer you continually, who question me to no purpose, and who do not desire to hear in order to learn; all you do is insult my words’”.

“As a final reply, the formerly blind man said, ‘Do you also want to become His disciples?’ (John 9:27) Now he has ranked himself among the band of disciples, for the ‘do you also?’ is the expression of one who is declaring himself to be a disciple. Then he mocked them abundantly. For since he knew that this struck them hard, he said it, wishing to criticize them with exceeding severity; the act of a courageous soul, soaring on high and despising their madness. He pointed out the greatness of this dignity, in which he was very confident, and showed that they insulted him who was a man worthy to be admired; he didn’t take the insult to himself, but grasped as an honor what they offered as a reproach.”

Cyprian of Carthage applied⁴⁸ the words of the man born blind, “God does not hear a sinner”, to the baptism of heretics in his day.

“It is necessary that he should be anointed who is baptized; having received the chrism⁴⁹, that is, the anointing, he may be anointed of God, and have

⁴⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVIII, 2.

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVIII, 2-3.

⁴⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, LXIX, 2.

In the case of the man born blind, he had offended the Jewish leaders. Being out of the synagogue meant he had no part in the worship of Israel. (Even Gentiles could take part at a distance!) This also meant he would have great difficulty finding employment and he may also be unable to inherit property.

There are other cases where people refused to acknowledge Jesus for fear of being “put out of the synagogue”. Israel and the synagogue worship was their hope of eternal life; to abandon this was hard to do. Some examples are as follows with comments from John Chrysostom:

1. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night so as to avoid being put out of the synagogue. Even at this time Nicodemus was favorable towards Christ, and stated, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him’ (John 3:1-2). Chrysostom stated⁵⁰ that Nicodemus still did not have the proper perspective about Christ, for he was still entangled in the Jewish reasoning. Therefore he came by night, because he feared to do so by day. Yet the merciful God did not reject him, or deprive him of His instruction, but with much kindness spoke with him and disclosed to him very exalted teachings. Far more deserving of pardon was Nicodemus than those who acted through wickedness. They were entirely without excuse; but Nicodemus, though he was liable to condemnation, yet was not so to an equal degree. The Apostle John noted that ‘of the rulers many believed on Him, but because of the Jews they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 12:42). In Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus he has implied this by mentioning his coming ‘by night’.
2. Prior to the raising of Lazarus, ‘Many of the Jews came to comfort Mary and Martha’ (John 11:19) Chrysostom stated⁵¹, “Why would they comfort women beloved of Christ, when they had agreed, that if any should confess Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue? It was either because of the grievous nature of the calamity, or that they respected them as of superior birth, or else these who came were not the wicked sort. The Evangelist mentions these circumstances, to prove that Lazarus was really dead.
3. Some people out of pride refused to identify with Jesus (John 12:40). John Chrysostom stated⁵², “Vainglory is a powerful thing and can blind the minds of those ensnared by it even to very obvious truths, persuade them to dispute what is allowed by others. It instigates in some, who know and are persuaded of the truth, to pretended ignorance and opposition. This took place in the case of the Jews, for they did not through ignorance deny the Son of God, but that they might obtain honor from the multitude. ‘They believed, but were afraid, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 12:42). So they gave up their salvation to others. It cannot be that he who is so zealous a slave to the glory of this present world can obtain the glory which is from God. Therefore Jesus rebuked them, saying, ‘How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God?’” (John 5:44).

⁵⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXIV, 1.

⁵¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXII, 2.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, III, 5.

4. Publicans and harlots were entering the kingdom of Heaven before the religious leaders. (Matthew 21:12-13). Chrysostom stated⁵³, “‘John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn’t believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him. When you saw *it*, you did not afterward relent and believe him’ (Matthew 21:32). Christ put forward the publicans and the harlots, then added this, by the order of their actions convicting their unpardonable conduct. He showed that for fear of men they do everything, and for vainglory. For they did not confess Christ for fear, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”
5. The love of money is a dreadful disease, but it becomes much worse, because it is the root and mother of all evil. Chrysostom stated⁵⁴, “‘Those who opposed Christ were broken off from the Faith through their love of honor. ‘Among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 12:42). Again ‘how can you believe who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only?’ (John 5:44). They were not rulers, but slaves in the utmost slavery. However, this fear was afterwards done away with, for nowhere during the time of the Apostles do we find them possessed by this feeling, since in their time both rulers and priests believed (Acts 6:7, 15:5). The grace of the Spirit came and made all the Apostles firmer than stone.”
6. Even the Twelve were huddled together by themselves after the Crucifixion for fear of the Jewish leaders (John 20:19).

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁵ that the Apostle Paul was at one time linked with the same Jewish leaders who put the formerly blind man out of the synagogue. How did Paul see this in retrospect? Chrysostom concludes that Paul didn’t begin an active role until after the Resurrection. While the Jewish leaders acted out of love for power, Paul acted out of zeal for the tradition of the fathers. Gamaliel may have had a lot to do with Paul’s viewpoint, and thus with Paul finding mercy.

“Paul magnified the mercy and loving-kindness of God, in describing his former life, ‘I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor’. When he speaks of the still unbelieving Jews, he rather extenuates their guilt. ‘I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge’ (Romans 10:2). Observe Paul’s lowering of himself! So free was he from self-love, so full of humility, that he was not satisfied to call himself a persecutor and a blasphemer, but he aggravated his guilt, showing that it did not stop with himself, that it was not enough that he was a blasphemer, but in the madness of his blasphemy he persecuted those who were willing to be godly. ‘But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief’” (1 Timothy 1:13).

“Why then did other Jews not obtain mercy? Because what they did, they did not ignorantly, but willfully, well knowing what they did. ‘Many of the Jews believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God’ (John 12:42, 43). Christ said to them, ‘How can you believe, who receive honor one of another’ (John 5:44)? The parents of the blind man ‘said these things for fear of the Jews, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 9:22). The Jews themselves said,

⁵³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 3.

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIX, 1.

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, III, v. 13.

‘Do you perceive how we gain nothing? Look, the world is gone after Him’ (John 12:19). Thus their love of power was everywhere in their way. When they admitted that no one can forgive sins but God only, and Christ immediately did that thing, which they had confessed to be a sign of divinity, this could not be a case of ignorance.”

“Where was Paul at this time? Perhaps he was still sitting at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and took no part with the multitude who conspired against Jesus, for Gamaliel does not appear to have been an ambitious man. Then how is it that afterwards Paul was found joining with the multitude at the death of Stephen? (Acts 7:58-8:1) He saw the doctrine growing, and on the point of prevailing, and being generally embraced. Paul did not act from the love of power as the other Jews did, but from zeal. The motive of his journey to Damascus was his opinion that the doctrine was pernicious, and he was afraid that the preaching of it would spread everywhere. With the Jews it was the love of power that influenced their actions. They said, ‘The Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’ (John 11:48). The fear that agitated them was that of man. How could one as skillful in the Law as Paul be so ignorant? It is Paul who says, ‘which He had promised before by His holy prophets’ (Romans 1:2). How is it that Paul didn’t know, when he was zealous for the Law of his fathers, and who was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel? The uneducated fishermen embraced the Gospel while Paul, who studied the Law, was persecuting it! It is for this he condemns himself, saying, ‘I am not worthy to be called an Apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:9). It is for this that he confesses his ignorance, which was produced by unbelief. For this cause, he says, that he obtained ‘mercy’. When Paul said, ‘He counted me faithful’ (1 Timothy 1:12), Paul meant that he gave up no right of his Master; even his own labors he ascribed to God, and assumed nothing for himself, and did not claim for his own the glory which was due to God.”

The Blind Man’s Recognition That Christ Is God

Jesus heard how the formerly blind man had been “cut off from Israel” and also realized how he had stood up to the heretical blasphemy of the Pharisees. Therefore Jesus sought him out and asked if he believed in the Son of God. Up until now, the formerly blind man had never seen Jesus. So he asked, “Who is He that I may believe?” When Jesus revealed Himself, the man said, “Lord, I believe!” and fell down and worshiped Him. This is real insight.

Chrysostom pointed out⁵⁶ that the Lord did not instruct the formerly blind man to believe, but asked him, “Do you believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35). The man had just been cut off from Israel for defending someone he didn’t even know. Christ rewarded him like a judge rewards the champion coming from the Olympic Games.

“When they had cast him out from the Temple, Jesus came for the purpose of meeting him. Observe how He recompensed him, by the chief of blessings. He made Himself known to him who before didn’t know Him, and enrolled him into the company of His own disciples. Observe the exact circumstances: when Christ had said, ‘Do you believe on the Son of God?’, the man replied, ‘Who is

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LIX, 1.

He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ (John 9:36) As yet he didn’t know Him, even though he had been healed; he was blind before he came to his Benefactor, and after the cure, he was being hassled by those dogs. Therefore like some judge at the games, Christ received the champion who had worked hard and gained the crown. After so much arguing against the Jews, after so many words, Jesus asked him, ‘Do you believe?’ He spoke this not from ignorance, but desiring to make Himself known, and showing gently that He valued the man’s faith. ‘This great multitude’, He said, ‘has insulted Me, but of them I make no account; for one thing I care, that you should believe. For better is one who does the will of God, than ten thousand transgressors’. Christ had approved what the formerly blind man had said; He asked this question to first bring him to a state of longing for Himself. He didn’t say directly, ‘Believe’, but in the way of an inquiry. The man said, ‘Lord, who is He, that I might believe on Him?’ The expression is that of a longing and inquiring soul. He didn’t know Him in whose defense he had spoken so much, that you may learn his love for truth.”

In today’s Gospel lesson, which took place in about December, 29 AD, Jesus had just come from a confrontation with the Jewish leaders that ended with their picking up stones to stone Him to death for claiming equality with the Father (John 8:58-59). John Chrysostom stated⁵⁷ that Jesus went straight from there to the man born blind, intentionally, to demonstrate what He had been saying, that He is equal with the Father.

Jesus wasn’t content to just let everything remain status quo. He had just come from a confrontation with the Jewish leaders that ended with their picking up stones to stone Him to death for claiming equality with the Father (John 8:58-59). John Chrysostom stated⁵⁸ that Jesus went straight from there to the man born blind, intentionally, to demonstrate what He had been saying, that He is equal with the Father. Now Jesus had made His point regarding equality with the Father, but there were other eyes that needed to be opened. So following this, Jesus had another long discussion with the Pharisees, where Nicodemus, Joseph and Gamaliel may have been present again. They had had such difficulty accepting His claim to be “I AM” who spoke to Moses (John 8:58) and Who created man out of dirt (Genesis 2:7). As Chrysostom put⁵⁹ it,

“To have said, ‘I am He, Who took the dust of the earth and made man,’ would have seemed a hard thing to His hearers. When shown by actual deeds, this no longer stood in their way. By taking earth and mixing it with spit, He showed His hidden glory. For no small glory was it that He should be deemed the Architect of the Creation”.

Thus after this demonstration with the man born blind, Jesus said:

- Because you say “we see,” you are really blind and your sin remains (John 9:40-41).
- He is the door to the sheepfold; others who enter by another way are thieves and robbers (John 10:1-10).
- He is also the Good Shepherd and His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:2-5).

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVI, 1.

- The Good Shepherd also gives His life for the sheep; hirelings don't do that! (John 10:11-18).

Again, a division arose among the Pharisees. One group said that Jesus had a demon (10:19-20) which is blasphemy and a sin against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:22-37). The other group countered with, "These are not the words of One who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:21) This encounter took place in December of 29 AD, or about four months before Jesus was crucified. After Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus and Joseph took His body for burial (John 19:38-39) and were then cut off from Israel themselves. Their eyes had been opened and they knew what they had to do!

John Chrysostom pointed out⁶⁰ that the works that Jesus did, such as restoring the man born blind, were things that no one had ever done before. As a result, there was strong reaction from the world to Jesus, Who was not of the world.

"They have no excuse. I gave them the teaching by words, and added that by works, according to the Law of Moses, who commanded all men to obey one speaking and doing such things, when he should both lead to piety, and exhibit the greatest miracles."

Jesus spoke not simply of 'signs', but, 'Which no other man did' (John 15:24). They themselves were witnesses of this, 'It was never so seen in Israel' (Matthew 9:33); and, 'Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind' (John 9:32). The raising of Lazarus was of the same kind, and also many other acts, and the mode of wonder working was new, and all beyond expectation.

'Why then do they persecute both You and us? Because you are not of the world! If you were of the world, the world would love its own' (John 15:19).

Hilary of Poitiers stated⁶¹ that the heretics of his day, who claimed that Jesus was a being created out of nothing, didn't know the Father, and therefore they can't know the Son. Thus they are like the Pharisees who reviled the formerly blind man, when he confronted them.

The ignorance of the heretics can be demonstrated by their ignorance of the fact that He is the Son of God. Let the victims of this delusion reflect upon the words, 'You neither know Me, nor where I am from' (John 8:19, 9:29). All things, they argue, are from nothing; they allow no exception. They dare to misrepresent God the Only-begotten as sprung from nothing. The fact that, as the Scripture says, they don't know where He is from, is an indication of that unknowable origin from which He springs. If we can say of a thing that it came into existence out of nothing, then we know its origin. We know that it was made out of nothing, and this is a piece of definite knowledge. Now He Who came is not the Author of His own being; but He Who sent Him is, Whom the blasphemers don't know. Thus the Sent is from the Sender; from Him Whom they don't know as His Author. None can confess the Son who denies that He was born; none can understand that He was born, who has formed the opinion that He is from nothing. He is so far from being made out of nothing, that the heretics cannot tell where He is from.

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVII, 2.

⁶¹ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VI, 29.

Hilary of Poitiers also stated⁶² that when Jesus asked the formerly blind man if he believed on the Son of God, this anticipated later heretics who “believed in Christ” yet denied that He was the Son of God.

“The Lord had given sight to a man blind from his birth; the Lord of nature had removed a defect of nature. Because this blind man had been born for the glory of God, that God’s work might be revealed in the work of Christ, the Lord did not delay till the man had given evidence of his faith by a confession of it. But though he didn’t know at the time Who had given him the great gift of eyesight, yet afterwards he earned a knowledge of the Faith. It was not the dispelling of his blindness that won him eternal life. When the man was already healed and had been ejected from the synagogue, the Lord asked, ‘Do you believe on the Son of God?’ This was to save him from the thought of loss, by the exclusion from the synagogue, by the certainty that confession of the true Faith had restored him to immortality. When the man, his soul still unenlightened, answered, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe on Him?’ The Lord’s reply was, ‘You have both seen Him, and it is He that talks with you’ (John 9:35-37). Christ removed the ignorance of the man, whose sight he had restored, and whom He was now enriching with the knowledge of so glorious a Faith. Does the Lord demand from this man, as from others, who prayed Him to heal them, a confession of faith as the price of their recovery? Emphatically not! The blind man could already see when he was thus addressed. The Lord asked the question in order to receive the answer, ‘Lord, I believe’ (John 9:38). The Faith which spoke in that answer was to receive not sight, but life.”

“Now let us examine carefully the force of the words. The Lord asked of the man, ‘Do you believe on the Son of God?’ If a simple confession of Christ, leaving His nature in obscurity as to whether He was God or not, were a complete expression of the Faith, the terms of the question would have been, ‘Do you believe in Christ?’ But in days to come almost every heretic was to make a parade of that name, confessing Christ and yet denying that He is the Son of God. Therefore He demands, as the condition of faith, that we should believe in what is peculiar to Himself, that is, in His Divine Sonship. What is the profit of faith in the Son of God, if it is faith in a creature, when He requires of us faith in Christ, not the creature, but the Son of God.”

John Chrysostom encouraged⁶³ the people of his day to imitate the formerly blind man, since we have been given much greater benefits than he was.

“These things are recorded, that we too may imitate them. The blind man, the beggar, who had not even seen Christ, immediately showed such boldness, standing opposed to a murderous, possessed, and raving people, who desired by means of his voice to condemn Christ. If he neither yielded nor gave back, but boldly stopped their mouths, and chose rather to be cut off from Israel than to betray the truth; how much more ought we, who have lived so long in the Faith. We have seen ten thousand marvels wrought by faith; we have received greater benefits than he; we have recovered the sight of the eyes within; we have beheld

⁶² Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, VI, 48.

⁶³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVIII, 4.

the ineffable Mysteries, and have been called to such honor. We certainly ought to exhibit all boldness of speech towards those who attempt to accuse, who say anything against the Christians, to stop their mouths, and not to acquiesce without an effort.”

THE CHURCH IN MACEDONIA

May 24, 2009
6th Sunday of Pascha
Revision G

Epistle: Acts 16:16-34

The Epistle lesson begins in about 49 AD on Paul's Second Missionary Journey. The First Church Council (in Jerusalem) had just concluded (Acts 15). James and the Apostles, elders and brethren in Jerusalem drafted a letter to be circulated among the Gentile churches (Acts 15:23-29) and sent it with Silas and Barsabas (or Joseph, see Acts 15:22, 32; 1:23). Barsabas was Jesus' step-brother and the brother of James, the Bishop of Jerusalem. After delivering the letter to Antioch, Barsabas returned to Jerusalem but Silas accompanied Paul on Paul's Second Missionary Journey. Later on, when Paul got to Corinth (Acts 18), Silas stayed behind (which is why he isn't mentioned at the conclusion of the Second Missionary Journey). Church tradition recognizes Silas as the first Bishop of Corinth. Also accompanying Paul and Silas at various points on the Second Missionary Journey were Andronicus, Urbanus, Timothy, Luke, Jason, Aquila, Priscilla and Gaius, all of the Seventy. Along the way, Paul also worked with Herodion, Cephas, Onesiphorus, Olympas, Dionysius, Crispus, Sosthenes, Epaenetus, Amplias, Stacys, Apelles and Aristarchus of the Seventy. Paul met the Apostle Peter in Macedonia at about this time and together they ordained Olympas, Jason and Silas as bishops for Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth respectively. At the time of the Epistle lesson Paul had either just met with Peter or would do so shortly.

Today's Epistle reading takes place in Philippi, which was the capital city of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). When Paul, Silas, etc., first arrived in Philippi, they met with the righteous women of Philippi who met for prayers outside the city by the riverside (Acts 16:13). These women were very receptive, were baptized and Lydia invited Paul to stay with them (Acts 16:15). On the way to prayers again, a fortune-telling slave girl began announcing Paul as "servant of the Most High God who proclaims to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). At first, Paul tolerated this; after all, it was true. But as days went by, the slave girl began turning things into a circus, distracting the serious matters of prayer that Paul was focusing on. [Does this ever happen today??] So Paul cast the demon out of the girl. The girl's eyes were opened as to what she was really doing: disrupting the prayer of the faithful.

A Spirit of Divination

The fortune-telling slave girl (Acts 16:16) had what was called a "spirit of Python"; (Greek *pneuma puthona*). This term comes from the Oracle at Delphi in Greece⁶⁴ that was

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⁶⁴ For example, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delphi>. Apollo is connected with the Oracle for having slain the chthonic serpent Python, named Pythia in older myths. Apollo dumped the body of the serpent into a hole in the ground. The priestess (or prophetess) called Pythia sat on a tripod seat over this hole and became intoxicated by the fumes from the decomposing body of the serpent. In her intoxicated state, the Pythia would fall into a trance allowing Apollo to possess her spirit. As she did this, she prophesied, speaking in riddles, which were interpreted by the priests of the temple. People consulted her on everything from important matters of public policy to personal affairs.

famous from about the 8th century BC to the 1st century BC, and which was located at the Temple of Apollo. The priestess at the Oracle was known as the “Pythia”, and was an older woman of blameless life chosen from among the peasants of the area.

John Chrysostom referred⁶⁵ to the Oracle at Delphi in passing to compare it to prophecy in the Church. At Delphi, there was coercion, frenzy and madness, whereas in the Church there is freedom, peace and understanding.

“The Pythoness, being a female, sat at times on the tripod of Apollo. Thus the evil spirit ascended from beneath and entered the lower part of her body, and filled the woman with madness. She, with disheveled hair, began to become intoxicated and to foam at the mouth; thus being in a frenzy, she uttered the words of her madness. I know that you are ashamed and blush when you hear these things; but they glory both in the disgrace and in the madness which I have described. All these things Paul brought forward when he said, ‘You know that when you were Gentiles, you were led away to those dumb idols, however you were led’” (1 Corinthians 12:2).

“Because he was speaking with those who knew well, he doesn’t state all things with exact care, not wishing to be troublesome to them, but having reminded them only, he soon quits the point, moving on to his subject.”

“What does he mean, ‘to those dumb idols?’ These soothsayers used to be led and dragged to them. But if they are themselves dumb, how did they give responses to others? And how did the demon lead them to the images? Just like men taken prisoner in war, and in chains, rendering his deceit plausible. To keep men from the notion that it was just a dumb stone, they were eager to rivet the people to the idols that their own style and title might be inscribed upon them.”

“But our rites are not like this, which was well known to the Corinthians, including prophecy with understanding and with entire freedom. Therefore they had power either to speak or to refrain from speaking. They were not bound by necessity, but were honored with a privilege. For this cause Jonah fled; (Jonah 1:3) for this cause Ezekiel delayed (Ezekiel 3:15); for this cause Jeremiah excused himself (Jeremiah 1:6). God didn’t thrust them on by compulsion, but advised, exhorted, threatened; not darkening their mind; for to cause distraction, madness and great darkness, is the proper work of a demon. It is God’s work to illuminate and with consideration to teach things that are needed.”

While it may seem strange for demons to point out the way of salvation, they may do so sometimes just out of fear. The Gadarene demoniac referred to Jesus as Son of the Most High God (Mark 5:7-8). The seven sons of the Jewish chief priest tried to cast out demons by “the Jesus whom Paul preaches” (Acts 19:13-16). The demon answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?” Then the demon possessed man jumped them and began tearing them apart. Demons do recognize who has authority over them.

John Chrysostom added⁶⁶ that the demon accommodated Paul in order to make itself credible so it could later deceive the new believers. But Paul saw through the malice of the demon as he said later, ‘For we are not ignorant of his devices’ (2 Corinthians 2:11).

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIX, 2.

⁶⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXXV, vv. 16-17.

Chrysostom also pointed out⁶⁷ that the demon in the slave girl attempted the same thing Simon Magus requested. That is, Simon asked the Apostle Peter for the power to confer the Holy Spirit on whomever he wished (Acts 8:12). He even offered to pay Peter! The demon in the slave girl was fearful of being cast out; it thought it could remain in the body of the girl if it preached the same things (Acts 16:17). However, Chrysostom stated, “Praise is not beautiful in the mouth of a sinner for it was not sent him of the Lord” (Ecclesiastics 15:9 LXX).

How Does Demon Possession Occur?

How does a demon come to “possess” a person like the slave girl? Who is susceptible to being possessed and how can possession be terminated? Many of the Desert Fathers spent considerable parts of their lives dealing with this, and they have written guidelines for us. John Cassian summarized the teachings of many of these Desert Fathers in his “Conferences”. In the following Cassian describes some of the mechanisms and limitations of demon possession.

John Cassian wrote⁶⁸ that demons couldn’t force themselves on us if we are unwilling, we must consent first in some way. The nature of spirits is very similar to the nature of our souls; both have a similar spiritual body. God, however, has a truly incorporeal nature; thus only God can penetrate into the inner part of either the soul or the spirit. When a demon “possesses” another creature, it inhabits and overwhelms their flesh not their soul or spirit. When demons influence our thoughts, they pick up on subtle hints from our inclinations and words to know what we are thinking. They do not read the thoughts of our heart; only God can do that. Different demons are devoted to different kinds of evil; they cannot all act at once, but depend on circumstances for an opportunity. They cannot hurt any man on their own, but must wait for permission from God. To possess someone, they first need to overcome the man’s mind and thought and to remove the recollection of God. When this happens, they take up residence as if it were given to them. Even though a possessed person may appear despicable, we should not hate those so delivered since this has all happened with God’s permission.

“Demons continually lie in wait for us. They oppose our progress by only inciting us to evil things and not forcing us. No one can completely avoid whatever sin they were inclined to imprint on our hearts, if a strong impulse was present to force evil on us. Demons have ample power of inciting, just as there is in us a supply of power of rejection, and the liberty of acquiescing. If we are afraid of their power, we may claim the protection and assistance of God against them: ‘For greater is He who is in us than he who is in this world’ (1 John 4:4). His aid fights on our side with much greater power than their hosts fight against us. God not only suggests what is good, but maintains it, so that sometimes He draws us towards salvation even against our will and without our knowing it. No one can be deceived by a demon except one who has chosen to yield to him the consent of his own will. As the Scripture puts it: ‘Because there is no contradiction made on the part of those who do evil quickly, therefore the heart of the children of men is fully determined to do evil’ (Ecclesiastes 8:11 LXX). It is clear that each man goes wrong from this; when evil thoughts assault him he does

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXXV, v. 17.

⁶⁸ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 8, 10, 12-13, 15, 17, 22, 24, 28.

not immediately meet them with refusal and contradiction. For it says, ‘resist the devil, and he will flee from you’” (James 4:7).

“Spirits can be joined with spirits, and can exercise an unseen power of persuasion toward what is allowed to it. Between them, just as between men, there can be some sort of similarity and kinship of substance, since the description of the nature of the soul applies equally well to the substance of spirits. But it is impossible for spirits to be implanted in spirits or united with them in such a way that one can hold the other; this is the true prerogative of Deity alone.”

“Demoniacs and those possessed by unclean spirits say and do what they do not want to, and are forced to say what they don’t know. They are not subject to the entrance of the spirits all in the same way, however; some are affected in such a way as to have not the slightest conception of what they do and say, while others know and can recall it. The spirit cannot infuse itself into the soul, be united to it or be clothed with it, even though it utters words and sayings through the mouth of the sufferer. This results not from loss of the soul but from weakness of the body. When the unclean spirit seizes on living creatures, it lays on them an enormous, intolerable weight and overwhelms them with foulest darkness, and interferes with their intellectual powers. We see this sometimes happen also from wine, fever or excessive cold, and it was this which the devil was forbidden to inflict on the blessed Job. He had received power over Job’s flesh, when the Lord commanded him, ‘I give him into your hands; only preserve his soul’ (Job 2:6 LXX). That is, do not weaken the seat of his soul and make him mad, and overpower the understanding and wisdom of what remains, by smothering the ruling power in his heart with your weight.”

“Spiritual natures exist, such as angels, archangels and the other powers, and our own souls, yet they are not incorporeal. They have in their own fashion a body in which they exist, though it is much finer than our bodies are, as Paul says, ‘There are celestial bodies, and terrestrial bodies’; and again, ‘It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body’ (1 Corinthians 15:40, 44). Only God is incorporeal, and therefore it is only by Him that all spiritual substances can be pervaded, because He alone is whole, everywhere and in all things, in such a way as to behold and see the thoughts of men and their inner movements and all the recesses of the soul. It was of Him alone that Paul spoke, ‘The word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to His eyes’ (Hebrews 4:12-13). Similarly David said, ‘Who fashions their hearts individually’ (Psalm 33:15); and again, ‘For He knows the secrets of the heart’ (Psalm 44:21); and Solomon too, ‘You alone knows the hearts of the sons of men’” (2 Chronicles 6:30).

“Unclean spirits can influence the character of our thoughts, but this is by affecting them from outside by sensible influences, i.e., either from our inclinations, from our words, and those likings to which they see that we are especially disposed. The thoughts which they suggest are discovered by them not from the nature of the soul itself, but from motions and signs given by the outward man. For example, when they suggest gluttony, they may have seen a person raising his eyes anxiously to the window or to the sun, or inquiring eagerly what time it is; they know that he has admitted the feeling of greediness. When

they suggest fornication, if they find him calmly submitting to the attack of lust, or see him perturbed in body, or not groaning as he ought under an impure suggestion, they know that the arrow of lust is already fixed in his soul.”

“Not all demons can implant all the passions in men, but certain spirits brood over each sin. Some gloat over uncleanness and filthy lusts, others over blasphemy, others are more particularly devoted to anger and wrath, others thrive on gloominess, others are appeased with vainglory and pride. Each one implants in the hearts of men that sin, in which he himself revels. They cannot implant their special vices all at one time, but in turn, as they have opportunity of time or place, or a man, who is open to their suggestions, arouses them.”

“Demons do not have the power to hurt any man on their own. This is shown by the blessed Job, where the enemy did not attempt to try him beyond what was allowed by Divine permission. It is also shown by the confession of the demons, where they said, ‘If You cast us out, allow us to go into the herd of swine’ (Matthew 8:31). They cannot of their own free will enter into any men who are created in the image of God, if they don’t have power to enter into dumb and unclean animals without the permission of God. Further, no one could live alone in the desert, as we monks do, surrounded by such swarms of foes of this kind, if they had unlimited power and freedom to hurt and tempt us. Still more clearly is this supported by the words of our Lord, when He said to Pilate, ‘You could have no power against Me at all, unless it had been given you from above’” (John 19:11).

“Thus unclean spirits cannot make their way into anyone in any other way than by first taking possession of their minds and thoughts. When they have robbed them of fear, the recollection of God and spiritual meditation, then they boldly advance on them, as if their victims had lost all protection and Divine safeguard, and could easily be bound. Then they take up their dwelling in them as if in a possession given over to them.”

“We ought not to hate or despise those whom we see to be delivered up to various temptations or to those evil spirits, because we hold these two points: First, no one can be tempted at all by them without God’s permission. Second, all things are brought upon us by God. Whether they seem to us to be sad or joyful, they are inflicted for our advantage by a most kind father and most compassionate physician. Men are given into the charge of schoolmasters, and humbled in order that when they depart out of this world they may be removed in a state of greater purity to the other life. They have been, as Paul says, delivered over at the present time ‘to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus’” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

John Chrysostom gave⁶⁹ three homilies directed against those who said that demons govern human affairs. Using the cases of the Gadarene Demoniacs and the Patriarch Job, Chrysostom showed that if demons were in charge, everyone would be treated like the Gadarene swine and like Job’s annihilated herds. In fact demons are not in charge, but they are strictly limited in what they can do and how far they can go.

“Some dare to say that demons administer our affairs. God chooses rather to be blasphemed by them through these words, than to commit their affairs to the

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Against Those Who Say That Demons Govern Human Affairs, I, 6.

demons and persuade them by the reality how demons really administer. Certain men possessed of demons coming out of the tombs met Christ, and the demons kept asking Him to allow them to enter the herd of swine. He allowed them; they went away, and precipitated them all headlong into the lake. This is how demons govern! They didn't care about the swine, but with us there is a continuous war without a truce, and an undying hatred. With the swine, they did not even allow a brief breathing space. If they had gotten us in their power, what would they not have done? For this reason God let them fall on the herd of swine, in order that we may learn their wickedness. They would have done to the possessed men the same things which they did to the swine, had not the demoniacs in their madness experienced the providence of God. Learn the wickedness of the demons! It is possible to see both things in the case of these demons, the loving kindness of God, and the evil of the demons. The evil of the demons harass and disturb the soul of the demented, whereas the loving kindness of God restrains and hinders so savage a demon, who desires to hurl the man headlong. He does not allow the demon to use his own power to the full, but allows him to exhibit just so much strength, as both to bring the man to his senses, and make his own wickedness apparent."

"Consider also the herds, the flocks of Job, how in one instant of time he annihilated everything; consider the pitiful death of the children, the blow that was dealt to his body. We see the savage, inhuman and unsparing character of the wickedness of the demons. From these things we know clearly that if God had entrusted the whole of this world to their authority, they would have confused and disturbed everything, and would have assigned to us their treatment of the swine, and Job's herds. If demons were to arrange affairs, we would be in no better condition than possessed men; rather we would be worse than they. God did not give over the demoniacs entirely to the tyranny of the demons; otherwise they would suffer far worse things than what they did. Regarding those who say that demons administer our affairs, what kind of disorder do they see that they imagine all our affairs to be the arrangement of demons?"

Chrysostom also mentioned⁷⁰ that the demons love the tombs and pretend that the souls of the dead become more demons. In line with this, 4th century sorcerers used dead children as mediums for their deceit. Chrysostom also compared demoniacs living in the tombs in his day to drunkards and fornicators. Both are naked and stripped of their proper glory.

"What is the reason that demons love to dwell in the tombs? They pretend to the multitude that the souls of the dead become demons, which God forbid we should ever admit into our conception. 'But what then will you say', one may ask, 'when many of the sorcerers take children and slay them, in order to have their soul afterwards to assist them?' Many tell us that the souls of the slain are with them; but how would they know, I ask? 'The possessed themselves', they reply, 'cry out, I am the soul of such a one'. This is a kind of stage-play; a devilish deceit. It is not the spirit of the dead that cries out, but the evil spirit that pretends these things in order to deceive the listeners. It is not possible for a soul to enter into the substance of an evil spirit, or into its own dead body."

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 3, 5.

“These things anyone may see happening right now. Many live in the tombs possessed of evil spirits, whom nothing restrains from their madness; not iron, chains, multitude of men, advice, admonition, threat, or any other such thing. When any man is drunken, eager for all embraces, he doesn’t differ at all from the demoniac, but goes about naked like him, clad indeed in garments, but deprived of the true covering, and stripped of his proper glory. He cuts himself not with stones, but with sins more hurtful than many stones. Who can bind such a person? Who can restrain his inappropriate frenzy, his way of never coming to himself, but forever haunting the tombs? For such are the resorts of the harlots, full of evil savor and rottenness.”

Why Would the Fortune-Telling Slave Girl Proclaim God?

Luke stated, “Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of Python met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation’. And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed⁷¹, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the Name of Jesus Christ to come out of her’. And he came out that very hour” (Acts 16:16-18).

If the mode of operation of a “spirit of Python” was like a drunken, foaming-mouth, possessed frenzy, for this slave girl to follow Paul and Silas for many days, there would be quite a distraction from their concentration on prayer and preaching.

John Chrysostom noted⁷² that the demon tried to accommodate himself in order to establish an opening later. Paul didn’t admit having anything to do with the demon and scorned it; when it began to encroach on the work of preaching, then Paul acted.

“What is the reason that both the demon spoke these words, and Paul forbids him? The demon acted maliciously, and Paul acted wisely, where the demon wished to make himself credible. If Paul had admitted the demon’s testimony, the demon would have deceived many of the believers, as being received by Paul. Therefore the demon endured to speak what seemed to be putting himself down, that he may establish an opening for himself; that is, the demon used accommodation in order to obtain destruction. At first, Paul would not admit the demon’s testimony, but scorned it, not wishing to engage in miracles all at once; but when it continued to do this, and pointed to their work of preaching, then he commanded it to come out. Luke says, ‘Paul being annoyed, turned and said to the spirit’ (Acts 16:18). Why was Paul annoyed? It means that he saw through the malice of the demon, as he said, ‘For we are not ignorant of his devices’ (2 Corinthians 2:11). Note that when the slave girl’s masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, then they acted. Everywhere money is the cause of evil. How cruel! They wanted the girl to remain a demoniac, that they might make money off her.”

⁷¹ Greek: *diaponeo* means to be annoyed in the sense of working hard with much labor. Thus the effect of the “Pythoness” was a lot more work for Paul.

⁷² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXV, vv. 16-17.

There were other heathen prophets who also understood what God was saying. The Philistines, enemies of Israel, captured the Ark of the Covenant in the days of the Prophet Samuel. However the Presence of the Ark caused all kinds of grief in Philistia, and their prophets knew it. Finally they decided to send the Ark back to Israel, and they seemed to know exactly what kind of an offering would appease God (1 Samuel 6:1-16). The demons behind the Philistine idols knew what God had decreed, and they communicated this to the Philistine prophets.

In another case, King Saul wanted to hear from God, but the Lord would not answer him, either by dreams, by consulting the prophets of Israel, or by consulting the priests, who carried the Urim and Thummim before the Lord in the Tabernacle (Numbers 27:21, Exodus 28:30). Therefore Saul consulted the medium at En Dor (a ventriloquist, probably with a crystal ball), who brought up the voice of Samuel, who had just died. This “Samuel” spoke to Saul about what was going to happen the next day, where Saul was going to be killed in battle. Thus the demon that associated with the medium at En Dor was able to gather what would happen from the arrays of both armies and their fighting spirit, and he knew that Israel would be routed.

Servants of the Most High God

Why would the demon in the slave girl “Pythoness” use the words: “These men are the servants of the Most High God?” (Acts 16:17) These same words were used on other occasions also. Melchizedek, who prefigured the Son of God as a priest, was referred to as the Priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18), just as Christ is referred to as a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 6:19-20). Also when the Gadarene demoniac first met Jesus, he said, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28)

On another occasion, when King Nebuchadnezzar saw the three young men walking around in the Furnace, accompanied by a 4th person who looked like the Son of God, he spoke to them, “Servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here” (Daniel 3:26). John Chrysostom noted⁷³ the conflict between God and the demon behind the god of fire in Babylon. The ripple effect had a pronounced impact on the bystanders, such as King Nebuchadnezzar and his officers. The blaspheming king then referred to the three young men as “servants of the Most High God”.

“Let us bear the present state of things nobly, knowing that this tribulation will both bring us deliverance from that punishment, if we understand how to practice true wisdom, and will also make us better here. Often those who get us into trouble, will be better if we are vigilant; so abundant is the force of this spiritual wisdom. This was the case also with the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar. When he knew that the three young men had suffered no harm in the Furnace, listen to how he changed his language. ‘You servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here’ (Daniel 3:26). Did he not say a little earlier, ‘Who is that God’⁷⁴

⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, VI, 11-12. This series of homilies were addressed to the people of Antioch after a popular uprising tore down the statues of the Emperor and his wife, and dragged them through the city. The people were expecting a Roman Division to massacre the city to put down the revolt.

⁷⁴ This was a conflict between gods in Babylon, since the Babylonians worshipped fire. Nebuchadnezzar heated the furnace to seven times hotter than normal, then threw the three young men in. The god of fire (a demon) met the Son of God (Daniel), and was shown to be impotent.

that shall deliver you out of my hands?’ (Daniel 3:15) What had happened? Why this change? He saw those soldiers outside the Furnace destroyed by the intense heat (Daniel 3:20-22), and does he call to those inside the Furnace? How has it come to pass that he has grown wise in such matters? A great change took place in the monarch! When he tried to exercise his power over them, he blasphemed; but as soon as he had thrown them into fire, he began to show moral wisdom. For this reason God permitted whatever the tyrant wished to take place, in order that He might make it clear, that no one will be able to injure those who are kept by Him.”

“What came to pass, that he called them the servants of God? Were they not his own servants? Nebuchadnezzar said in effect, ‘They have overthrown my sovereignty; they have trampled under foot my pride. They have shown by deeds that He is their true Lord. If they were the servants of men, the fire would not have feared them; the flame would not have made way for them. The creation knows nothing about reverencing or honoring the servants of men’. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’” (Daniel 3:28).

The Way of Salvation

The slave girl “Pythoness” stated that Paul and Silas “proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). What is meant by “the way of salvation”? There are several implications. First it is the preaching of the Church by all, everywhere, and at all times. To those who are weighted down with sin, rest is the way of salvation. The way of salvation also implies that we do as we say. Yet it is not rigid and legalistic, but can take a different form for different people.

Irenaeus stated⁷⁵ that the way of salvation refers to the Church everywhere throughout the world.

“The preaching of the Church is true and steadfast, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world. To her is entrusted the light of God; and therefore the ‘wisdom’ of God. By means of this she saves all men, and ‘is declared in the open squares; it utters its voice faithfully in the streets, is preached on the tops of the walls, and speaks continually in the gates of the city’ (Proverbs 1:20-21). The Church preaches the truth everywhere, and she is the seven-branched candlestick which bears the light of Christ.”

Basil the Great spoke⁷⁶ of the way of salvation as being a rescue for anyone from the death due to slaves of sin.

“We can escape now. While we can, let us lift ourselves from the fall; let us never despair of ourselves, if only we depart from evil. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. ‘O come, let us worship and fall down before Him; let us weep before the Lord that made us’ (Psalm 95:6 LXX). The Word, Who invited us to repentance calls aloud, ‘Come to me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28). There is, then, a way of

⁷⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, V, xx, 1.

⁷⁶ Basil the Great, Letter to a Fallen Virgin, XLVI, 6.

salvation, if we will. ‘Death has prevailed and swallowed men up; but the Lord God has taken away every tear from every face’ (Isaiah 25:8 LXX) of them that repent. The Lord is faithful in all His words and holy in all His works (Psalm 145:13 LXX). He does not lie when He says, ‘Though your sins are scarlet they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson they shall be as wool’ (Isaiah 1:18). The great Physician of souls, Who is the ready liberator, not of you alone, but of all who are enslaved by sin, is ready to heal your sickness. From Him come the words, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’ (Matthew 9:12-13). What excuse do you have, what excuse does anyone have, when He speaks thus? The Lord wishes to cleanse you from the trouble of your sickness and to show you light after darkness.”

Cyprian of Carthage stated⁷⁷ that our walk starts with learning and doing what the Lord taught; that is, keeping the Commandments; our walk advances in the way of salvation. On the other hand, those depart from the way of salvation when what they say doesn’t agree with what they do.

“‘Whoever’, says He, ‘hears my words, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, that built his house upon a rock. The rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn’t fall; for it was founded on a rock’ (Matthew 7:24). We ought therefore to stand fast on His words, to learn and do whatever He both taught and did. How can a man say that he believes in Christ, who does not do what Christ commanded him to do? How shall he attain the reward of faith, who will not keep the faith of the commandment? He must of necessity waver and wander; he will be caught away by a spirit of error; like dust which is shaken by the wind, he will be blown about. He will make no advance in his walk towards salvation, because he does not keep the truth of the way of salvation.”

“We ought to remember by what Name Christ calls His people, by what title He names His flock. He calls them sheep that their Christian innocence may be like that of sheep; He calls them lambs, that their simplicity of mind may imitate the simple nature of lambs. Why does the wolf lurk under the clothing of sheep? Why does he who falsely asserts himself to be a Christian, dishonor the flock of Christ? To put on the Name of Christ, and not to go in the way of Christ, what else is it but a mockery of the Divine Name, a desertion of the way of salvation? He Himself teaches that he shall come to life who keeps His commandments, and that he is wise who hears and does His words. He, moreover, is called the greatest doctor in the kingdom of heaven that thus does and teaches (Matthew 5:19). What has been well preached by the preacher will be an advantage to him, if what is uttered by his mouth is fulfilled by deeds following. But what did the Lord more frequently instill into His disciples, what did He more charge to be guarded and observed among His saving counsels and heavenly precepts, than that with the same love wherewith He Himself loved the disciples, we also should love one another?”

⁷⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, I, 2.
Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, X, 12.

Gregory Thaumaturgus stated⁷⁸ that the way of salvation is not a rigid, legalistic decree, but takes a different form for each of us, as all things to all people.

“When the Gospels or the Epistles are read, don’t let your attention center on the book or on the reader, but on the God who speaks to you from heaven. The book is that which is seen, while Christ is the divine subject spoken of. The Readings bring us the good news, which is worthy of all praise. That is, though He was God, He became man through kindness toward man, and did not lay aside the dignity which was His from eternity, but assumed the Divine plan that should work salvation. He lived with us as a physician for the sick, who did not heal us with potions, but restored us. The Readings bring us the good news of this Divine plan: to those who had wandered, it shows the way of salvation; to the despairing it makes known the grace of salvation, which blesses everyone differently. Searching after the erring, enlightening the blinded, giving life to the dead, setting free the slaves, redeeming the captives, it becomes all things to all of us in order to be the true way of salvation for us.”

Paul and Silas Began “Night Watches”

With the demon gone from the slave girl, the fortune telling business failed and Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned for killing the business. The charges, of course, were trumped up:

- They trouble our city (i.e. they baptize people).
- They teach unlawful customs (i.e. they teach prayer).

One might note that the slave girl’s owners could have brought Paul and Silas to the magistrates many days ago while the slave girl “Pythoness” was still generating good sales figures. Because they didn’t do this, their true motives are very transparent: all they care about is their profit, not about troubling the city, not about unlawful customs, not about the slave girl. The magistrates did not inquire into the circumstances, and they did not allow Paul or Silas to speak in their own defense; both of these things were required by the Mosaic Law, but Philippi was not governed by the Mosaic Law.

We note that Paul and Silas did not even try to plead for themselves. They just submitted to the completely unjust punishment, where this kind of punishment generally left the victims almost dead. Paul explained the rationale for this later when he said, “For when I am weak, then I am strong. My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9):

John Chrysostom stated⁷⁹ that it was probably from the wish to cut short the disturbance, that the magistrates did these things; because they saw the crowd all worked up, and wished to restrain their passion at the instant, therefore they inflicted the stripes. At the same time it was their wish to hear the matter, and that was why they threw them into prison and gave charge “to keep them safely”. Therefore the jailor, “fastened their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:23-24),

⁷⁸ Gregory Thaumaturgus (i.e. Gregory the Wonder-Worker), “Second of Four Homilies on the Annunciation”, in Dubious and Spurious Writings, Volume 6, Ante-Nicene Fathers. While this work is usually ascribed to Gregory, some think it may have been written by John Chrysostom.

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXXV, v. 17.

Chrysostom also pointed out⁸⁰ the contrast between the demon and the slave girl's owners: the demon said, "These are servants of the Most High God" (Acts 16:17); the owners said, "These men exceedingly trouble our city" (Acts 16:20). The demon said, "They proclaim to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17); the owners said, "They teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive" (Acts 16:21). The owners do not even listen to the demon, but look only to one thing: their covetousness.

After Paul and Silas were tried and convicted by the magistrate, "Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailor to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:22-25).

In prison that night, Paul and Silas were treated as the most desperate of criminals. They were in the inner prison (maximum security) with their feet fastened to leg irons. Plus they were naked and bleeding from their wounds. So what did they do? They prayed and sang!

Orthodox Midnight Prayers

Paul and Silas' midnight vigil (Acts 16:25), along with the vigil at the home of the mother of John Mark, where everyone prayed for Peter's release from prison (Acts 12:12), became the theme later in the 1st century for Midnight Prayers⁸¹. The Apostles had already established Matins (i.e. morning) and Vespers (evening) Prayers⁸² as well as 1st, 3rd, 6th and 9th Hour Prayers along with Compline (bedtime) Prayers. The Midnight Prayers (or the Prayer of Watching) are divided into three kinds depending on the day of the week: Midnight Prayers for a Sunday, Daily Midnight Prayers and Midnight Prayers for a Sabbath or Saturday. All three speak of the Second Coming of Christ, but different Psalms are used in each.

Each of the Midnight Prayers uses Psalm 50. The Midnight Prayers for a Sunday follows Psalm 50 with the Triadika Megalynaria. The Daily Midnight Prayers substitute Psalm 118 for the Triadika Megalynaria, and the Midnight Prayers for a Sabbath substitutes Psalms 64 to 69.

Psalms Used for Midnight Prayers

Sunday	Daily	Sabbath (Saturday)
Psalms 50	Psalms 50, 118, 120, 133	Psalms 50, 64 to 69, 120, 133

The persistent theme of the Midnight Prayers is the immanent wrath of God, coming down on the heads of evil doers. Like the Second Coming of Christ, there is a judgment about to come down on evil doers. The righteous are currently in a state of affliction, shot at in secret, subject to snares, overpowered, afflicted on their backs and hated without a cause. When the

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXXV.

⁸¹ Rev. Seraphim Nassar, Divine Prayers and Services, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood, NJ, 1993, p. 1071.

⁸² Matins and Vespers took the place in the Early Church of the Morning and Evening Continual Burnt Offering (Exodus 29:38-46). For example, at Great Vespers we say, "Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice."

Lord comes, there will be fire before Him, a tremendous blast of wind and an earthquake. The people will be judged; His enemies will be scattered and melted like wax before fire; His wrath will be poured out on them and their houses will be made desolate.

Some excerpts from Psalm 50 are: “God, our God, shall come manifestly, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall be kindled before him, and round about him there shall be an exceedingly great blast of wind. Call on Me in the day of affliction; and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. Pause and consider this! Your mouth has multiplied wickedness, and your tongue has framed deceit. You sat and spoke against your brother. I will reprove you, and set your offences before you” (Psalm 50:3, 15, 19-21 LXX).

Some excerpts from Psalm 118 are: “I called on the Lord out of affliction, and He listened to me, so as to bring me into a wide place. The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do to me”. “The Lord has chastened me severely; but He has not given me over to death” (Psalm 118:5-6, 18 LXX).

Some excerpts from Psalms 64 to 69 are: “They have sharpened their tongues as a sword; they have bent their bow maliciously; to shoot in secret at the blameless; they will shoot him suddenly, and will not fear. They have set up for themselves an evil matter, they have given counsel to hide snares; they have said, ‘Who shall see them?’” (Psalm 64:3-5 LXX) Hear my prayer; to thee all flesh shall come. The words of transgressors have overpowered us; but do pardon our sins” (Psalm 65:2-3 LXX). “You, O God, have proved us; You have tried us with fire as silver is tried. You brought us into the snare; You laid afflictions on our back” (Psalm 66:10-11). “Let the nations rejoice and exult, for You shall judge the people in equity, and shall guide the nations on the earth. Pause and consider this!” (Psalm 67:4 LXX) “Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; and let them that hate him flee from before him. As smoke vanishes, let them vanish; as wax melts before the fire, so let the sinners perish from before God. When You went before Your people, when You went through the wilderness; Pause and consider this! The earth quaked; the heavens dropped water at the presence of the God of Sinai, at the presence of the God of Israel” (Psalm 68:1-2, 7-8 LXX). “They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; my enemies that persecute me unrighteously are strengthened. Turn not away Your face from your servant; for I am afflicted; hear me speedily. Draw near to my soul and redeem it; deliver me because of my enemies. Let their eyes be darkened that they should not see; and bow down their back continually. Pour out Your wrath on them, and let the fury of Your anger take hold on them. Let their habitation be made desolate; and let there be no inhabitant in their tents” (Psalm 69:4, 17-18, 23-25 LXX).

Since these Midnight Prayers were put together shortly after Paul and Silas’ ordeal, the Psalms used in the Midnight Prayers were probably the same ones that Paul and Silas were singing. In the ancient Middle East, Psalms were usually chanted, where the chanting of different Psalms may be in different keys. Many people were so familiar with the Psalms that they knew them all by heart, and the chanting of Psalms was an integral part of the worship of the Church. Similarly today, the chanting of Psalms is an integral part of the worship of the Orthodox Church.

Jerome wrote⁸³ to the priest Riparius regarding the heretic Vigilantius, whose name means “The Wakeful One”, but who opposed night vigils. Jerome pointed out that the Lord, the Prophets and the Apostles used night watches to great advantage.

“The Lord had said, ‘What, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak’ (Matthew 26:40-41). And in another place a prophet sings, ‘At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you because of your righteous judgments’ (Psalm 119:62). We read also in the Gospel how the Lord spent whole nights in prayer (Luke 6:12) and how the apostles when they were shut up in prison kept vigil all night long. They sang their Psalms until the earth quaked, the keeper of the prison believed, and the magistrates and citizens were filled with terror (Acts 16:25-38). Paul says, ‘Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving’ (Colossians 4:2), and in another place he speaks of himself as ‘in watching often’ (2 Corinthians 11:27). Let us say with David, ‘Behold, he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep’ (Psalm 121:4). So will the Holy One and the Watcher come to us (Daniel 4:13). And if ever by reason of our sins He falls asleep, let us say to Him, ‘Wake up, why do You sleep, O Lord? Do not cast us off forever’ (Psalm 44:23); and when our ship is tossed by the waves let us rouse Him and say, ‘Lord, save us; we are perishing’” (Matthew 8:25).

John Cassian wrote⁸⁴ that it is not just among the monks in Egypt that night watches are done, but elsewhere also. A few at a time take their turn for a week, and this duty rotates through their numbers week by week. At the end of the week, those on duty wash the feet of their brethren as their brethren pray over them.

“In other countries as well there is a daily service undertaken by the brethren. For throughout the whole of Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Cappadocia and all the East, the brethren succeed one another in turn every week for the performance of certain duties, so that the number serving is according to the whole number of monks in the Coenobium. They hurry to fulfill these duties with zeal and humility more than any slave bestows in his service to a harsh and powerful master. Not satisfied only with these services which are rendered by canonical rule, they actually rise by night in their zeal and relieve those whose special duty this is. Each one, who undertakes these weeks, is on duty and has to serve until supper on Sunday; when this is done, his duty for the whole week is finished. When all the brethren come together to chant the Psalms (which according to custom they sing before going to bed) those whose turn is over wash the feet of everyone in turn, seeking faithfully from them the reward of this blessing for their work during the whole week. The prayers offered up by all the brethren together accompany them as they fulfill the command of Christ (Ephesians 6:18). Interceding for their ignorance and for their sins committed through human frailty, the prayers of the brethren commend to God the complete service of their devotion like some rich offering. On Monday after the Matins hymns, they hand over the vessels and utensils with which they have served to others who take their place.”

⁸³ Jerome, Letter to Riparius, CIX, 3.

⁸⁴ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, IV, 19.

The Prisoners Were Listening to Paul and Silas

“At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed” (Acts 16:23-24).

The other prisoners were listening intently and expectantly. The jailor was listening also. Paul and Silas were bleeding all over from being beaten with rods, where they could have undergone over a hundred strokes with an iron rod⁸⁵. A beating with rods was applied to both the back and the chest, and left the subject very weak and usually with a few broken bones. Paul and Silas' behavior was very unusual; people beaten with rods generally moaned all night from their wounds and bruises, murmuring against God and reviling whoever gave them the beating. But Paul and Silas were singing praises to God!

In Jewish society, a beating would have been limited to forty strokes; but in this case Gentiles, not Jews, administered it. For sure, Paul and Silas were in considerable pain and their backs were raw and bleeding.

When the “great earthquake” struck, (Acts 16:26) and the doors were opened, it came as an answer to Paul and Silas' prayer and singing. Normally, an earthquake wouldn't unfasten leg irons. But it may pull the building down on top of them. This earthquake had some intelligence to it and the prisoners had their eyes opened quite clearly to see this.

Earthquakes occur in that part of the world more than in California. The jailor, who would answer with his life if any prisoners escaped, figured they were all gone when he saw the damage and the doors open. Paul had to restrain him from suicide by telling him that everyone was still there. Chrysostom said⁸⁶ that the jailor was more amazed that all the prisoners were still there than he was at the earthquake. The other prisoners didn't leave either since they knew this was no ordinary jailbreak. For most people, if they were in the prisoners' place, heard some people keeping an all-night vigil and praying for an earthquake – and then it happened – they'd be wondering what else these guys could do! There's more with them than any army Rome can muster!

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁷ that Paul's experience in Philippi demonstrated what he said about God's strength being perfected in Paul's weakness. Paul was exhausted, bleeding and chained up, but he rocked the prison, broke open the doors and broke off everyone's chains.

“Unbelievers may think that God is weak, and allows people to be continually afflicted, from not being able to deliver His own from dangers. Observe how Paul has demonstrated not only that the events were far from accusing God of weakness, but also that they proved His power more strikingly to everyone. Paul said, ‘There was given me a thorn in the flesh; a messenger of Satan to punch me’, and having mentioned his repeated trials, he goes on to add,

⁸⁵ Paul Copan, “The Ancient Near East Was No Picnic” suggests that ancient Egyptian law permitted beating criminals for perjury with between 100 and 200 strokes. According to the Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt, a 100-stroke beating was the mildest form of punishment.

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*, XXXVI, v. 25.

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues*, I, 16.

‘Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times, that it might depart from me; and He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). ‘My power’, He means, ‘is seen then when you are in weakness; and yet through you, who seem to grow weak, the word preached is magnified, and is sown everywhere’. When he was led to the dungeon, after having received a great number of stripes, he took prisoner the keeper of the prison. His feet were in the stocks, and his hands in chains; and the prison shook at midnight, while they were singing hymns (Acts 16:25). Do you see how God’s power was made perfect in weakness? If Paul had been free and had shaken that building, the thing would not have been so wonderful. ‘For this reason’, He said, ‘remain bound; and the walls shall be shaken on every side, and the prisoners shall be freed; in order that My power may appear the greater, when through you, confined and chained, all that are in bonds shall be freed’. This circumstance astounded the keeper of the prison, that being so forcibly confined, he through prayer alone, prevailed to shake the foundations, throw open the doors of the prison, and free all the prisoners. This is not the only occasion. With Peter too, as well as the other Apostles, one may see this occurring constantly; in the midst of persecution, the grace of God flourishes, appears alongside the tribulations, and thus proclaims His power. Therefore He said, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’”.

The Jailor Was Listening to Paul and Silas

The jailor realized that Paul saved his life by not escaping and his eyes were opened too; so he asked Paul what he must do to be saved. Paul responded by speaking the word of the Lord to the jailor, the other prisoners and the jailor’s household. The jailor then washed and dressed Paul and Silas’ wounds and Paul and Silas held a midnight baptism followed by feasting and rejoicing.

John Chrysostom commented⁸⁸ that this ordeal was a blessing in disguise. The earthquake did not come all by itself, which one can see by the loosening of everyone’s chains. The loosening of the chains prefigured the loosening of the jailor’s heart.

“What could equal these souls? These men had been scourged, had received many stripes; they had been misused, were in peril of their lives, were thrust into the inner prison, and fastened in the stocks. Yet they did not allow themselves to sleep, but kept vigil all night. Do you take note what a blessing tribulation is? That the earthquake should not seem to have come of itself, there was this concurrent circumstance bearing witness to it; the doors were opened and all their bonds were loosed. This happened at night, for the Apostles did not work for display but for men’s salvation. Here, they no sooner showed the doors standing open, and it opened the doors of the jailor’s heart. It loosed two sorts of chains. That prisoner (Paul) kindled the true light; for the light in his heart was shining. The jailor said immediately, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ What then does Paul answer? ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your house.’ For this above all wins men, that one’s household also should

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*, XXXVI, vv. 25-39.

be saved. The faith of the jailor was a voice in itself. What could be equal to this? Paul is put in bonds, and looses, being bound. These are indeed works of grace”.

Chrysostom also noted⁸⁹ that while the earthquake roused the keeper of the prison from sleep, the doors flew open, and he wondered at what had happened, the other prisoners didn't notice that the doors were open; otherwise they all would have fled. The wonder overpowered him! He wondered more at Paul's kindness; he was amazed at his manly boldness; that he had not escaped when he had it in his power; that he hindered him from killing himself. There was no need for other miracles, since the earthquake was sufficient for the jailor's conversion, seeing that he was personally in danger if the prisoners escaped. It is not so much miracles that overpower us, as the things which bring our own deliverance. The keeper was not an evil-disposed man that he 'thrust them into the inner prison' (Acts 16:24); this was because of his 'having received such a command' (Acts 16:23-24), not of himself.

Chrysostom also compared⁹⁰ Joseph's prison time with that of Paul. Both were imprisoned unjustly as a result of their trying to stand up for righteousness. While the keepers of prisons tend to be brutal to those inside, Joseph and Paul were able to win the affection of their keeper. Paul applied this lesson-learned to Bishops in the Church. To be a good governor, one first needs to learn to be governed; then he needs to rule his own house well.

“Those who have the custody of prisons tend to practice cruelty more than most people. They harass those in afflictions, with a more than brutal cruelty. They take advantage of those wretched circumstances which ought to elicit their pity. They do not treat all their prisoners in the same manner; those prisoners who are accused only, and who are harmfully treated, they perhaps pity. But they punish with numberless inflictions those who are imprisoned for shameful and atrocious crimes. The keeper of the prison might have been incensed against the young man, Joseph, who was charged with repaying favors by a base attempt on the master's wife (Genesis 39). Considering the honor to which Joseph had been raised, and the crime for which he was imprisoned, would he not have treated him with more than brutal cruelty? But the keeper of the prison was raised above all these things by his hope in God. For the virtue of the soul can soothe even wild beasts. By the same meekness which had gained his master, Joseph captivated also the keeper of the prison. Thus Joseph was again a ruler; he ruled in the prison as he had ruled in the house. For since he was destined to reign, it was fit that he should learn to be governed and while he was governed he became a governor, and presided in the house.”

“For if Paul requires this of one who is promoted to a Church, saying, ‘If a man doesn't know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?’ (1 Timothy 3:5), it was fit that he who was to be a governor, should first be an excellent ruler of the house. Paul, like Joseph, presided over the prison, not as over a prison, but as if it had been a house. He alleviated everyone's calamities, and took charge of those who were imprisoned as if they had been his own members. He not only took an interest in their misfortunes and consoled them, but if he saw anyone absorbed in thought, he went to him and

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XXXVI, v. 27.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Titus, IV, Moral.

inquired the cause; he could not bear to see anyone dejected, or be easy till he had relieved his dejection. Such love as this, many people don't show even to their own children."

Orthodox Evangelism

When the Lord sent the Twelve Apostles out two by two, He told them to first "Inquire who is worthy, and stay there" (Matthew 10:11). The person that they stayed with received a significant blessing from the Lord. This is exactly what Paul did in Philippi. "On the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay'. So she persuaded us" (Acts 16:13-15).

Traditionally, the next thing that the Church established is prayer in the city that they came to. This had already been started with Lydia and the other women. Today, if the Bishop or priest comes to a city, he may begin praying all by himself at first; that is OK. The prayer life forms the foundation for the Lord's work as He answers the prayers of the faithful. This is what happened in Philippi also, and the demon in the slave girl "Pythoness" was trying to disrupt this prayer life.

John Chrysostom noted⁹¹ several things about Paul and Silas' contact with Lydia. First, she was not wealthy or a leading citizen, but a humble seller of purple. Second, Paul was following the Lord's instructions to the Twelve by inquiring who was worthy and staying with them. Third, the work in Philippi began with Lydia's willing and eager heart.

"The place where Paul and Silas first met Lydia was convenient for hearing the word, aloof from troubles and dangers. Since it was 'On the Sabbath' (Acts 16:13), there was no work going on, and they could be more attentive to what was spoken. 'Lydia was a seller of purple' (Acts 16:14); observe how the writer of the history is not ashamed of the occupations of the converts. Having learned these things, let us also be ashamed of no man. Peter stayed with a tanner (Acts 9:43); Paul, with a woman who was a seller of purple and a foreigner. There is no pride in Paul and Silas for accepting these humble accommodations from someone 'Whose heart the Lord opened'. We need God, to open the heart; but God opens the hearts that are willing, for there are hardened hearts to be seen also. 'Lydia attended to the things which were spoken by Paul' (Acts 16:14). The opening, then, was God's work; the attending was hers; so that it was both God's doing and man's. She was baptized (Acts 16:15), and received the Apostles with such earnestness of entreaty, with more than that used by Abraham. She spoke of no other token than that whereby she was saved (Genesis 18:3). She does not say, 'If you have judged me a great, a devout woman'; but, 'faithful to the Lord' (Acts 16:15). She doesn't say, 'Stay with me', but, 'Come to my house and stay'. With great earnestness, she says it; indeed a faithful woman!"

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXV, Recapitulation.

The next day (Acts 16:35), the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas released quietly. Paul and Silas had been beaten and jailed just to satisfy the mob that was aroused by the slave girl's owner. And Paul took the beating without saying anything. [Paul and the Twelve were beaten a number of times during their missionary journeys.] Why would they not speak up for their rights? In this case, the answer is that Paul was looking out for the new Philippians converts who might incur the same treatment.

When the magistrates beat Paul without a trial, they violated Roman law and could be severely punished – and they knew it. All Paul had to do was appeal to Rome (Acts 25:11) and their heads would roll. Roman citizens were not allowed (1) to be beaten without a trial, and (2) to be incarcerated without a trial. As in Paul's case later, if the Roman citizen was not satisfied with the outcome of the trial, he could appeal to the Emperor himself.

At first the magistrates sent officers to release Paul and Silas (Acts 16:35). Undoubtedly they had discovered overnight what actually happened, and that the masters of the slave girl "Pythoness" were just mad at losing their profitable business. However, Paul told the officers that the magistrates had just beaten and incarcerated Roman citizens; they need to come themselves and bring us out of prison! Thus the magistrates had to come crawling on their knees to Paul to beg him not to prosecute them for this injustice.

With this hanging over the heads of the magistrates, they were very unlikely to harass Lydia, the jailor, the prisoners, etc., in response to the owners of the slave girl or any others who sought to persecute the new Church.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹² another aspect of this situation. If Paul and Silas just left when the magistrates allowed them to, they would be leaving as if they were already condemned. Paul wanted to turn this around so that the magistrates would be the ones condemned.

"The magistrates said, 'depart, and go in peace' (Acts 16:36); that is, go in safety, fearing no man. But Paul said to them, that he did not want to seem to be receiving his liberty as one condemned, and as one that has done wrong. Therefore he said, 'Having openly beaten us innocent Roman citizens' (Acts 16:37), that it may not be a matter of grace on the part of the magistrates. Besides, they wanted the jailor himself to be out of danger, that he may not be called to account for this afterwards. They do not say, 'Having beaten us', who have worked miracles; for the magistrates did not even pay attention to these. Instead they said that which was most effective to shake their minds, 'innocent Roman citizens'. Observe how diversely grace manages things: how Peter went out of prison, how Paul was released, though both were Apostles. 'The magistrates feared' because the men were Romans (Acts 16:38), not because they had unjustly thrown them into prison. 'The magistrates asked Paul and Silas to leave the city' (Acts 16:39), begging them as a favor."

Following this incident, Paul and Silas left Philippi, but Luke evidently stayed behind in Philippi. We can see this by looking closely at Luke's words; when they arrived in Philippi, Luke said, "As we went to prayer" (Acts 16:16). When it comes to the departure from Philippi, Luke switches to "they departed" (Acts 16:40) and "they passed through Amphipolis" (Acts

⁹² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXV, Recapitulation.

17:1). The third person “they” continues for about five years until Paul passed through Macedonia again on his Third Missionary Journey, at which time Luke again resumes the first person “We sailed away from Philippi” (Acts 20:6).

As Paul and Silas left Philippi, the only Christians that are mentioned are Lydia from Thyatira in Asia Minor and the jailor and the other prisoners along with their families. Others are also implied (Acts 16:40), however, such as those that met for prayer at the river side. When Paul returned to Macedonia five years later, he took up a significant collection in alms for the impoverished Jerusalem Church⁹³. By then, the Church in Philippi had grown considerably and was able to contribute to these alms. Luke’s efforts in this regard may not have been limited to Philippi, but may have included Berea, Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-15) and even Illyricum (Romans 15:19).

There are not enough Sundays in the Church Year to cover all the Acts of the Apostles, but this Epistle lesson sets the tone and illustrates some of the works of Paul. Church tradition records the missionary journeys of the other Apostles where similar events occurred.

⁹³ See Acts 24:17, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; Romans 15:25-27.