

ZACCHAEUS SUNDAY
THE ROLE OF BISHOPS

January 26, 2014
15th Sunday of Luke
Revision F

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10
Epistle: 1 Timothy 4:9-15

In the East, Zacchaeus Sunday usually precedes the Lenten Triodion (the ten weeks before Easter). In the West, today’s Gospel lesson is used either at about this same time of year, or in late October.

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Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus had regular contact with tax collectors and so did John the Baptist. For example: the Apostle Matthew was a tax collector when he was called (Matthew 9:9-13). Many tax collectors were baptized by John the Baptist (Luke 3:12-13). And prior to Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus, all the tax collectors had come to hear Jesus (Luke 15:1-2). Whether Zacchaeus was among them listening to Jesus, we’re not told. We can conclude, however, that Zacchaeus was at least very much informed concerning Jesus by those he worked with.

Zacchaeus, as a tax collector, was a rich man who was not haughty or arrogant like some people (1 Timothy 6:17-19). Being rich, he could have gone to Jesus with a delegation of groupies. But his actions convey a sense of unworthiness, being content to just gaze at a distance from up in a tree (Luke 19:4). Zacchaeus was stunned with joy when Jesus announced that He needed to stay at his house that day.

The Role of Tax Collectors in Israel

Tax collectors in Israel represented the scum of society, even though they were generally very wealthy, because they made their living by gouging the poor. There were different kinds of tax collectors: some went door-to-door and others like the Apostle Matthew (Matthew 9:9, Luke 5:27), sat all day in a toll booth along the road or at a harbor. For Jesus to associate with such folks as Zacchaeus and Matthew there was an immediate scandal among the Pharisees. This was not exactly their concept of what the Messiah was going to do. As Paul said, “God has chosen the base things of the world and the things which are despised, to shame the things which are mighty and to bring to nothing the things that are! (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

History of Tax Collectors

Alfred Edersheim gave¹ a very good summary on how taxation worked in Israel and during the history of Israel. Rome required a certain amount of tax money from a region of the world based on a census of the region. The right to collect these taxes was auctioned to the highest bidder. The tax collector then informed each individual how much he needed to pay, where refusal or inability to pay could end up with the individual and his family being sold into slavery. The tax collectors reported to corrupt officials, who also received a piece of the action, and the methods used by the tax collectors amounted to outright extortion.

“Ever since their return from Babylon, the Jews had been accustomed to foreign taxation. At the time of Ezra (Ezra 4:13, 20; 7:24) they paid ‘ground-tax’, ‘custom’, and ‘toll’ to the Persian monarch. Under the reign of the Ptolemies (c. 300 BC to 200 BC) the taxes seem to have been farmed to the highest bidder, which enabled the Palestine tax-farmers to acquire immense wealth, even though they had to continually purchase weapons and court favor. During the Syrian rule (c. 200 BC to 170 BC) the taxes consisted of tribute, duties on salt, crops, besides poll-tax, custom duty, and ‘crown-money’. Under the Herodians (c. 37 BC to 44 AD) the royal revenue seems to have been derived from crown lands, from a property and income-tax, from import and export duties, and from a duty on all that was publicly bought and sold, to which must be added a tax on houses in Jerusalem.”

“This extortion weighed heavily on a comparatively poor and chiefly agricultural population. In addition, every town and community levied its own taxes for the maintenance of synagogue, elementary schools, public baths, the support of the poor, the maintenance of public roads, city walls, and gates, and other general requirements. The Jewish authorities distributed this burden of civic

¹ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1994, pp. 51-56.

taxation both easily and kindly, and they applied the revenues derived from it for the public welfare in a manner not attained even today in most civilized countries. However, the Rabbinical authorities took care themselves not to pick up the heavy burdens that they laid on others, by expressly exempting from civic taxes all those who devoted themselves to the study of the Law. The Roman taxation was quite of its own kind — systematic, cruel, relentless, and utterly regardless. In general, there were two great taxes — poll-tax (or rather income-tax) and ground-tax. All property and income that didn't fall under the ground-tax was subject to poll-tax; which amounted to one per cent. The “poll-tax” was really twofold, consisting of income-tax and head-money. Head-money was the same in all cases, and levied on all persons (bond or free) up to the age of sixty-five. Landed property was subject to a tax of one-tenth of all grain, and one-fifth of wine and fruit, partly paid in product and partly commuted into money. Besides these, there was tax on all imports and exports, levied on the great public highways and in the seaports. Then there was bridge-money and road-money, and duty on all that was bought and sold in the towns. These were the regular taxes, and had to be furnished to the Roman procurator and his household and court at Caesarea.”

“The proconsul of Syria, Quirinius, had taken a regular census to show the number of the population and their means (Luke 2:1-4). This was a terrible crime in the eyes of the Rabbis, who remembered that, if numbering the people had been reckoned such great sin of old (2 Samuel 24:1-10), the evil must be a hundredfold increased, if done by heathens and for their own purposes. Another offense lay in the thought that tribute, before given only to God, was now to be paid to a heathen emperor. ‘Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?’ (Matthew 22:17) was a burning question, which many an Israelite put to himself as he placed the emperor’s poll-tax beside the half-shekel of the sanctuary (Exodus 30:12-14), and the tithe of his field, claimed by the tax-gatherer, along with that which he had before given only to the Lord. Even the purpose with which this inquiry was brought before Christ — to entrap Him in a political denunciation — shows, how much it was agitated among patriotic Jews; and it cost rivers of blood before it was not answered, but silenced in the Jewish revolt of 66 to 70 AD.”

“The Romans had a peculiar way of levying these taxes — not directly, but indirectly —with no thought to any harm it might inflict on the taxpayer, and put the whole cost of the collection on the taxpayer. Senators and magistrates were prohibited from engaging in business or trade; but the highest order, the equestrian, was largely composed of great capitalists. These Roman knights formed joint stock companies, which bought at public auction the revenues of a province at a fixed price, generally for five years. The board had its chairman, or magister, and its offices at Rome. These were the real publicans, who often sublet certain of the taxes. The publicans in Rome employed either slaves or some of the lower classes in the country as tax-gatherers — the publicans of the New Testament. Similarly, all other taxes were farmed and collected. Harbor-dues were higher than ordinary tolls, and smuggling or a false declaration was punished by confiscation of the goods. Thus the publicans also levied import and export dues, bridge-toll, road-money, and town-dues. If the peaceable inhabitant, the tiller of the soil, the tradesman, or manufacturer was constantly exposed to

their exactions, the traveler, the caravan, or the peddler encountered their vexatious presence at every bridge, along the road, and at the entrance to cities. Every bale had to be unloaded, and all its contents tumbled about and searched; even letters were opened; it must have taken more than Eastern patience to bear their insolence and to submit to their ‘unjust accusations’ in arbitrarily fixing the return from land or income, or the value of goods. There was no use appealing against them, although the Law allowed this, since the judges themselves were the direct beneficiaries of the revenue. The joint stock company of publicans at Rome expected its handsome dividends; so did the tax-gatherers in the provinces, and those to whom they on occasion sublet the taxes. Everyone wanted to make money off the poor people; and the cost of the collection had to be added to the taxation. We can understand how Zacchaeus, one of the supervisors of these tax gatherers in the district of Jericho, must have received large revenue from Jericho’s growth and export of balsam. Remembering Zacchaeus’ past life, he said, ‘If I have taken anything from any man by false accusation’ () or rather, ‘Whatever I have wrongfully exacted of any man’. For nothing was more common than for the publican to put a fictitious value on property or income. Another favorite trick was to advance the tax to those who were unable to pay, and then to charge usurious interest on what had thereby become a private debt.”

“These debts were collected harshly; a creditor, for the small debt of one hundred denarii could seize the debtor by the throat in the open street, and drag him to prison (Matthew 18:28-30). The miserable man, in his fear of the consequences, in vain might fall down at his feet, and beg him to have patience. The consequences were for the creditor not only to sell off all that his debtor has, but even himself, his wife, and children into slavery (Matthew 18:25). The unhappy man could expect from ‘the magistrate’ imprisonment till ‘the last mite’ had been paid” (Luke 12:58-59).

“Cicero might describe the Publicans in Rome as ‘the flower of knighthood, the ornament of the state, and the strength of the republic’, or as ‘the most upright and respected men’. The Rabbis in distant Palestine had intense dislike of ‘the publicans’. They even went to the extent of declaring them incapable of bearing testimony in a Jewish court of law, forbidding priests to receive their charitable gifts, or even to change money out of the treasury. They ranked them not only with harlots and heathens, but with highwaymen and murderers, and even declared them to be excommunicate. It was held lawful to make false returns, to speak untruth, or to use any means to avoid paying taxes. At about the time of Christ the burden of such taxes were felt all the heavier on account of a great financial crisis in the Roman Empire, which involved many in bankruptcy, and had indirect influence even on distant Palestine.”

Publicans as Examples of Wickedness

In the Church that Christ established, those people whose conduct was not in keeping with His commandments were to be treated as heathen and as a publican. “If your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth

of two or three witnesses every word may be established'. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17).

John Chrysostom noted² how Jesus spoke of judgment in the Church, chaired by the Bishop, dedicated to our repentance. If we refuse to listen to the elders of the Church, we are to be treated as publicans, whom Jesus used as examples of the greatest wickedness; and Judgment Day will not go well for us. Jesus established this for our correction in order that we might have hope at Judgment Day.

"What did Christ mean when He said, 'In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established?' (Matthew 18:16) His meaning is that you have done everything you can, that you have left undone none of the things which you could have done."

"If he neglects to listen to the Church, let him be to you as a heathen man and as a publican' (Matthew 18:17). After going through this and refusing to listen three times, such a person is incurably diseased."

"Notice how everywhere He puts forward the publican for an example of the greatest wickedness. Before this Jesus had said, 'Do not even the publicans do the same? (Matthew 5:46) Again, 'Tax collectors and harlots are entering the kingdom of God before you' (Matthew 21:31); that is, those who are utterly reprobate and condemned. Let them listen, who are rushing after unjust gain, who are counting up usuries upon usuries. Why did Christ set these things up? To calm down the person that has been wronged, and to alarm him! Is this the only punishment? No; listen to what follows! 'Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven' (Matthew 18:18). He did not say to the ruler of the Church, 'Bind such a man', but, 'If you bind', committing the whole matter to the Bishop, and the bonds remain indissoluble. Therefore he will suffer the maximum punishment. The one who has brought the sinner to account is not to blame, but he who has hardened his heart to being persuaded."

"Do you see how there is a twofold constraint, both the vengeance here, and the punishment hereafter? Christ has warned us about these things in order that these circumstances may not happen. If we really are afraid of being thrown out of the Church, the danger of the bond here, and it being bound in Heaven, we may become gentler. Knowing these things, and seeing the multitude of the judgments in the Church we may put off our anger. Christ has set over us a first, a second and a third court, so that though we should neglect to hear the first, we may yield to the second; and even if we should reject that, we may fear the third. Though we belittle even this, we may be dismayed at the vengeance to come, and at the sentence and judgment to proceed from God."

Chrysostom also noted³ that the publicans among Jesus' disciples at one time were in really wretched shape due to an unchecked desire for more wealth. But they restored their health by giving up their wealth.

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LX, 2

³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXIV, 5.

“How is it possible for a rich man to be saved? By possessing his goods in common with those that are in need, as Job was (Job 29:12-17), and exterminating out of his soul the desire for more, in no points going beyond real need.”

“Together with these He shows that the publican, Matthew, who was oppressed by the fever of covetousness, was quickly set free from it. What could be more sordid than a publican? Nevertheless, the man became indifferent to wealth from obeying the laws of the physician. Jesus had for His disciples such persons as these, who were sick from the same diseases as we are, and who recovered their health quickly. He shows this to us, in order we may not despair. Note again Zacchaeus, a chief of the publicans, who promised fourfold for all that he had extorted, and the half of all that he possessed, that he might receive Jesus.”

The Person Zacchaeus

Figure 1
Zacchaeus with Athanasius of Meteora⁴



Zacchaeus was described as a man of short stature (Luke 19:3), which was the reason he had to climb the sycamore tree in order to see Jesus. In Figure 1, Zacchaeus (left) is pictured alongside Athanasius of Meteora⁵.

As soon as Jesus announced his plans to stay with Zacchaeus, the crowd began to murmur. They had been taught that a person is defiled or rendered unclean by associating with those who may be unclean. For example, the Scribes and Pharisees would not even go into a

⁴ <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?SID=4&ID=1&FSID=148976>

⁵ Athanasius of Meteora was a 14th century monk at Mt. Athos. Even though Athanasius lived 1300 years later than Zacchaeus and in a different place, they are pictured together since they have the same Feast Day (April 20th).

Gentile building in order that they might not be defiled (John 18:28). Again, Peter was very cautious with Cornelius – a Gentile – when the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:28). Peter had to do some serious explaining when “those of the circumcision” found out Peter actually went in to eat with uncircumcised men (Acts 11:1-3). Later Peter fell back into old habits and had to be corrected by Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2:12) when he ate with the Jews only.

While Zacchaeus was not a Gentile (Luke 19:9), many of those he associated with were. And because tax collectors were notorious for extortion and fraud (Luke 3:12-13), there was good reason to consider them unclean, and for people to avoid association with them.

However, this phobia with Gentiles was actually an exaggeration of the Mosaic Law. According to the Law, a person was rendered unclean by:

- (1) Eating non-kosher foods (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14)
- (2) Touching a dead body (Numbers 19)
- (3) Leprosy or an issue of blood or body fluids (Leviticus 13, 14, 15).

However, if a person touched someone who had touched a dead body, both people were unclean at least until evening. The Pharisees evidently didn't take any chances. They wouldn't even associate with anyone who MAY have touched a dead body or even with the buildings these people lived in. The whole point regarding the Law was to teach something about the defilement of sin and its consequences, which render a person really unclean before God. But the Pharisees had reduced this to “the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7) and neglected the weightier matters of the Law such as justice, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

A Man Who is a Sinner

Luke's Gospel stated, “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house’. So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner’” (Luke 15:5-7). What is the implication of the words “a man who is a sinner”?

Gregory of Nyssa stated⁶ that one of the characteristics of Baptism is a change in our lifestyle. There may be no change in our physical appearance, but there is a change in the desire of our soul, and thus in our willingness to sin. The publicans Zacchaeus and Matthew illustrated this, as did the Apostle Paul. We begin to imitate our Father's characteristics in all aspects of our life.

“Naaman the Syrian, who was diseased with leprosy, came to Elisha; Elisha cleansed the sick man by having him wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5), clearly indicating what should come, both by the use of water generally, and by the dipping in the river in particular. The Jordan alone of rivers, received in itself the first-fruits of sanctification, and conveyed in its channel to the whole world the grace of Baptism. Following are the indications in deed and act of regeneration by Baptism. Consider first the prophecies of Baptism. ‘Wash and

⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, “Sermon on the Baptism of Christ”, Oratorical Works, Part V.

make yourself clean; remove your iniquities from your souls' (Isaiah 1:16 LXX); and 'Draw near to Him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed' (Psalm 34:5 LXX). Ezekiel, writing more clearly says, 'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be cleansed; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you from all your uncleanness. I will give you a new heart, and will put a new spirit in you. I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; I will put My Spirit in you' (Ezekiel 36:25-27 LXX). Zechariah prophesied of Joshua, the High Priest, who was clothed with filthy clothing (that is, the flesh of a servant), and stripped him of his ugly clothes and adorned him with clean and beautiful clothes (Zechariah 3). This teaches us that in the Baptism of Jesus we all put off our sins like some poor garment, and are clothed in the holy and most beautiful garment of regeneration. The oracle of Isaiah cries to the wilderness, 'Be glad, O thirsty wilderness; let the desert rejoice and blossom as a lily; and the desolate places of Jordan shall blossom and shall rejoice' (Isaiah 35:1-2 LXX). This is not a place without soul or sense to which he proclaims the good tidings of joy; he speaks, by the figure of the desert, of the soul that is parched and unadorned. Just like David, when he says, 'My soul thirsts for You, as a dry land' (Psalm 143:6 LXX), and, 'My soul is thirsty for the mighty, for the living God' (Psalm 42:2). The Lord said, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink' (John 7:37); and to the woman of Samaria, 'Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst'" (John 4:13-14).

"All who are made glad by the gift of regeneration should show the change in their ways that follow it. Our body remains unchanged, but there is certainly need of some clear proof, by which we may recognize the new-born man. These are found in the intentional motions of the soul, whereby it separates itself from its old customary life, and enters on a newer way of conversation; it has become something different from its former self, bearing in it no token by which the old self was recognized. This is the mode of the transformation. A man before Baptism may have been lustful, covetous, grasping at the goods of others, a reviler, a liar, a slanderer, etc. After Baptism let him become orderly, sober, content with his own possessions, giving to those in poverty, truthful, courteous, and affable—in a word, following every laudable course of conduct. As darkness is dispelled by light, and black disappears as whiteness is spread over it, so the old man also disappears when adorned with the works of righteousness. You saw how Zacchaeus, by the change of his life, slew the publican, making fourfold-restitution to those whom he had unjustly damaged, and the rest he divided with the poor. The treasure, which he had gotten by evil means from the poor, whom he oppressed, he restored. The Evangelist Matthew, another publican, of the same business with Zacchaeus, immediately after his call changed his life as if it had been a mask. Paul was a persecutor, but after the grace bestowed on him, was an Apostle. He bore the weight of his fetters for Christ's sake, as an act of amends and repentance for those unjust bonds which he once received from the Law."

“Everyone should be like this in their regeneration; we should blot out our old habits that tend to sin; for after the grace bestowed we are called His children. Therefore we ought to scrutinize our Father’s characteristics, that by fashioning and framing ourselves to the likeness of our Father, we may appear true children of Him, Who calls us to the adoption according to grace. The bastard son, who contrasts his father’s nobility in his deeds, is a sad reproach. Therefore the Lord Himself, lays down for us in the Gospels the rules of our life, ‘Do good to those that hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:44-45). Then they are sons, when in their own modes of thought they are fashioned in loving kindness towards their kindred, after the likeness of the Father’s goodness.”

Clement of Alexandria made the point⁷ that the Lord reproves and chastises those who are His sons. A man who is a sinner is not reproved but is censured and denounced as being wicked. This contrasts with Christ’s response to Zacchaeus, who had been a notorious sinner; but who came to the Lord with a repentant heart.

“Reproof is the bringing forward of sin, laying it before one’s eyes. This form of instruction He employs as necessary, by reason of the feebleness of the faith of many. Isaiah says, ‘You have forsaken the Lord, and have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger’ (Isaiah 1:4). Jeremiah says, ‘Heaven was astonished at this, and the earth was exceedingly horror-struck. For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns, which will not be able to hold water’ (Jeremiah 2:12-13 LXX). Again, ‘Jerusalem has sinned a *great* sin; therefore she has come into tribulation; all that used to honor her have afflicted her, for they have seen her shame’ (Lamentations 1:8 LXX). He uses the bitter and biting language of reproof in His consolations by Solomon, tacitly alluding to the love for children that characterizes His instruction: ‘My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; nor faint when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the Lord loves He rebukes, and scourges every son whom He receives’ (Proverbs 3:11-12 LXX). ‘A sinful man will shun reproof, and will find a decision according to his liking’ (Ecclesiasticus 32:17 LXX). Consequently, the Scripture says, ‘The righteous shall chasten me with mercy, and reprove me; but let not the oil of the sinner anoint my head’” (Psalm 141:5 LXX).

“Bringing one to his senses is censure, which makes a man think. This is also a form of instruction, ‘To whom shall I speak, that he may listen? Your ears are uncircumcised, and they shall not be able to hear’ (Jeremiah 6:10 LXX). Again, ‘All the Gentiles are uncircumcised in flesh, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised *in their hearts*’ (Jeremiah 9:26 LXX). ‘The people are disobedient; false children, who will not hear the law of God’ (Isaiah 30:9 LXX).

Visitation is severe rebuke. He uses this in the Gospel: ‘O Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones them that are sent to you!’ He that knows God, knows that He does not persecute His servants. Wherefore He continues, ‘Your

⁷ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, I, 9.

house is left desolate; for I say to you, henceforth you shall not see Me, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord' (Matthew 23:37-39). If you do not receive His love, you shall know His power."

"Denunciation is vehement speech. And He employs denunciation as medicine saying, 'Ah, sinful nation, lawless sons, a people full of sins, lawless children!' (Isaiah 1:4 LXX) And 'Brood of vipers' (Matthew 3:7). Accusation is censure of wrong-doers. This mode of instruction He employs by David, 'A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me; The foreigners submit to me' (Psalm 18:43-44). And 'I put her away, and gave into her hands a bill of divorce; yet faithless Judah feared not, but went and herself also committed fornication' (Jeremiah 3:8). Again, 'The house of Israel dealt treacherously with Me; and the house of Judah lied to the Lord'" (Jeremiah 5:11-12).

Do Not Keep Company with Sinners

On many occasions in the New Testament, the people of God are instructed not to keep company with sinners. For example, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). But yet at the same time, many publicans and prostitutes joined the Early Church. This is not contradictory since there was a repentant heart among those joining the Church, and the Church stood strongly against the sinful ways of these new members' former life.

Just as Christ's command to the Church was to avoid associating with a brother who was caught up in sin, so Paul and John stated the same thing. For example:

- "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).
- "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people" (1 Corinthians 5:9).
- "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you" (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7).
- "And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).
- "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 1:10-11).

Cyprian of Carthage wrote⁸ to priests in his district that they should not have fellowship with heretics and with the wicked. They should be treated as a heathen man and as a publican.

"The teachings and precepts of God prevail with the heretics only in proportion to the fear of God that is in them; yet my love persuaded me to write

⁸ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Father Cornelius, LIV, 21.
Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Magnus, LXXV, 1.

these things to you, that you should have no contact with them. No banquets or conferences should be entertained with the wicked; but we should be as much separated from them, as they are deserters from the Church. It is written, 'If he refuses even to hear the Church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector' (Matthew 18:17). Paul not only warns, but also commands us to withdraw from such. 'We command you', he says, 'in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not according to the tradition which he received from us' (2 Thessalonians 3:6). There can be no fellowship between faith and faithlessness. He who is not with Christ, who is an adversary of Christ, who is hostile to His unity and peace, cannot be associated with us. If they come with prayers and atonements, let them be heard; if they heap together curses and threats let them be rejected".

Basil the Great wrote⁹ about how a brother who has sinned should be approached. The Church should not gang up on him, but should approach him with tenderness in order to convert him. If the sinner refuses to listen to the brethren, the sinner should be cut off and treated like a publican for the security of the others.

"The Christian ought not to grudge another's reputation, nor rejoice over any man's faults (1 Corinthians 13:6 loosely). In the love of Christ, he ought to grieve at his brother's faults, and rejoice over his brother's good deeds (1 Corinthians 12:26). He ought not to be indifferent or silent before sinners (1 Timothy 5:20). He who shows another to be wrong ought to do so with all tenderness (2 Timothy 4:2), in the fear of God, and with the object of converting the sinner. He who is proved wrong or rebuked ought to take it willingly, recognizing his own gain in being set right. When anyone is being accused, it is not right for another, before him or anyone else, to contradict the accuser. If at any time the charge seems groundless to anyone, he ought privately to enter into discussion with the accuser, and either produce, or acquire, conviction. Everyone ought, as far as he is able, to conciliate one who has ground of complaint against him. No one ought to cherish a grudge against the sinner who repents, but heartily to forgive him (2 Corinthians 2:7). He who says that he has repented of a sin ought not only to be pricked with compunction for his sin, but also to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8). He who has been corrected in first faults, and received pardon, if he sins again prepares for himself a judgment of wrath worse than the former (Hebrews 10:26-27). He, who after the first and second admonition (Titus 3:10) remains in his fault, ought to be brought before the person in authority, if perchance after being rebuked by more people he may be ashamed (Titus 2:8). If even thus he fail to be set right he is to be cut off from the rest as one that offends everyone; he should be regarded as a heathen and a publican (Matthew 18:17), for the security of those that are obedient. This concurs with the saying, 'When the ungodly fall, the righteous are warned (Proverbs 29:16 LXX). He should be grieved over as a limb cut from the body. The sun ought not to go down upon a brother's wrath (Ephesians 4:26), lest

⁹ Basil the Great, Letter on the Perfection of the Life of the Solitaries, XXII, 3.

perchance night come between brother and brother, and make the charge stand in the Day of Judgment.”

The Example of Zacchaeus as a Prelude to Lent

The spiritual application of the story of Zacchaeus has been used widely as an example of one returning to the things of God. Coming as a lead-in to Lent, Johanna Manley wrote¹⁰ a very good summary of the application of this to our lives today:

“We Gentiles, through Christ, are also ‘sons of Abraham’ (cf. Galatians 3:7-9). Like Zacchaeus and the publicans, we have extorted, gouged the land, borrowed against our progeny, and accumulated gains falsely for our own ends. Like Zacchaeus, we need to raise ourselves above the passions and jostling of the masses and reach out to invite Christ. We have turned away from God. We are all lost. But our Savior still seeks us. He is inviting Himself today to our house, though we are sinners. Let us give of ourselves to the needy – to Christ. Atheistic governments have prevented us. Yet under governments of freedom we have prevented ourselves by indolence, and by the delusions of busy worldly pursuits. Let us rejoice and welcome Him with open arms and make recompense for our sins”.

Jerome wrote¹¹ to the recent widow Salvina on the death of her husband, Nebridius, encouraging Salvina to continue her husband’s almsgiving in order that she, like a camel, might pass through the eye of the needle¹² like Zacchaeus did. Salvina later was one of John Chrysostom’s deaconesses.

These remarks are intended to show that the youth Nebridius used his kinship to the royal family, his abundant wealth, and the outward tokens of power, as helps to virtue. As the preacher says, ‘wisdom is a defense and money is a defense’ (Ecclesiastes 7:12). We must not hastily conclude that this statement conflicts with that of the Lord, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a

¹⁰ Joanna Manley, The Bible and the Holy Fathers, pp. 561-562.

¹¹ Jerome, Letter to Salvina, LXXIX, 3.

¹² The illustration Jesus gave of camels and needles has been little understood in our generation. The main gates of most cities in ancient times were huge wooden structures set in an archway and often overlaid with brass for strength and flame-proofing. At night, the gates were closed and locked with a bar on the inside and not opened until morning. Travelers that arrived late in the day after the gates were closed were forced to spend the night outside the city unless there was some provision for them to get into the city. Outside the city, law and order did not exist at night and travelers were at the mercy of outlaws.

To deal with this situation, many ancient cities had a “needle’s eye gate” which was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus (G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, pp. 24-25). A man could fit easily through the “needle’s eye gate”, but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel’s pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the “needle’s eye gate.”

Jesus’ statement made use of this imagery. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The parable of the sower refers to this pack as “the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things” (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God.

camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Matthew 19:23-24). Were it so, the salvation of Zacchaeus the publican, described in Scripture as a man of great wealth, would contradict the Lord's declaration. But what is impossible with men is possible with God (Mark 10:27) we are taught by the counsel of Paul, 'Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life' (1 Timothy 6:17-19). We have learned how a camel can pass through a needle's eye, how an animal with a hump on its back, when it has laid down its packs, can take to itself the wings of a dove (Psalm 55:6) and rest in the branches of the tree, which has grown from a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32).

In his commentary, Cyril of Alexandria pointed¹³ out that with Zacchaeus in a tree and dressed in long robes, the crowd below him could clearly see whether or not he was wearing his loincloth. Cyril saw in this a riddle. "For in no other way can a man see Christ and believe in Him except by mounting up into the sycamore (fig) tree, by rendering foolish his members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, etc."

The sycamore fig tree was often planted by roadsides and reached a very large size¹⁴. Cyril likened the fig tree to the Law and the fruit on the fig tree to the application of the Law to the thoughts and intents of the heart, such as circumcision from vice and a Sabbath's rest from bad practice. Zacchaeus was "ready to change from vice to virtue; wherefore also Christ called him, and he will leave the fig tree to gain Him". That is, he will climb into the Law and apply it to his own life.

Restoring Theft Fourfold

Zacchaeus responded to the murmur of the crowd with a correct interpretation of the Law. He said that if he had taken anything from anyone, he would restore it fourfold. This came from the Law where anyone who stole a sheep had to repay the owner fourfold (Exodus 22:1).

In addition, Zacchaeus went well beyond the letter of the Law in his generosity. The Law prescribed a tithe for the Lord (used to support the priests, Numbers 18:20-24), a second tithe for the festivals (Deuteronomy 12:17-19), and a third tithe every three years for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). While this part of the Law was only followed sporadically, due to the continual backsliding of Israel, Zacchaeus' quintuple tithe (half of all his goods) for the poor was much more than the Law required.

John Chrysostom noted¹⁵ that the Scriptures teach almsgiving as a medicine for our sins; the greater the sin, the more medicine that is needed.

¹³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 19, Homily 127, pp. 505-506, Studion Publishers, 1983.

¹⁴ Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 1144.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV.

Can there be pardon for great impieties? Yes! There is no sin, which alms cannot cleanse, none, which alms cannot quench; all sin is beneath this; it is a medicine adapted for every wound. What is worse than a publican? The matter of his occupation is altogether one of injustice; and yet Zacchaeus washed away all these sins. Note how Christ shows this, by the care taken to have a money box, and to carry the contributions put into it (John 13:29). Paul says, 'Only that we remember the poor' (Galatians 2:10); and everywhere the Scripture has much to say about this matter. 'The ransom of a man's soul is his own wealth' (Proverbs 13:8 OSB LXX), and with reason; for Christ said, 'If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow Me' (Matthew 19:21). This may well be part of perfection.

Chrysostom used¹⁶ Zacchaeus and Matthew as examples of how people can rid themselves of a lust for money. Other examples in the Scriptures speak of how people were destroyed who couldn't rid themselves of this; people need to hear this.

Those who are seized by lust for money and broken down, if they will consent to put themselves into the hands of the Word for healing, I promise large hope of salvation by the Grace of God. If they will consider those who have suffered and fallen into that derangement and have recovered, they will have good hope of removing the disease. Who then ever fell into this disease, and was easily rid of it? The well known Zacchaeus! Who could be fonder of money than a publican? Yet all at once he became a man of strict life, and put out that whole blaze. Matthew in like manner; for he too was a publican, living as a plunderer. But he likewise all at once stripped himself of the evil, quenched his thirst, and followed after spiritual gain. Considering these and those like them; don't despair; you shall be able to recover quickly if you want. If you wish, we will prescribe accurately what you should do according to the rule of physicians.

It is necessary then, before all other things, to be right in this that we never despair of our salvation. Next, we must look not only at the examples of those who have done well, but also at the sufferings of those who have persisted in sin. Just as we have considered Zacchaeus and Matthew, so we also ought to take account of Judas, Gehazi, Achan, Ahab, Ananias and Sapphira¹⁷, in order that by the one, we may cast out all despair, and by the other we may cut off all indolence. The soul should not become reckless in the remedies suggested. Let us teach people to say what the Jews said on Pentecost, approaching Peter, 'What must we do to be saved?' (Acts 2:37, 16:30) Let people hear what they must do.

See also Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV, xii, 5.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XI, 9.

¹⁷ Judas was a thief (John 12:6) and hanged himself when his plan went awry (Matthew 27:4-5). Gehazi lusted for the wealth that Naaman offered; as a result, he inherited Naaman's leprosy (2 Kings 5) along with his wealth. Achan lusted for the valuables in the rubble of Jericho and caused many Israeli soldiers to get killed; he was stoned to death for his lust (Joshua 7). Ahab lusted for the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kings 21). Ananias and Sapphira lusted for material wealth and lied to the Holy Spirit. They keeled over dead when the Apostle Peter spoke to them about it (Acts 5:1-10).

Chrysostom also stated¹⁸ that if fourfold-restitution under the Law is required, much more is required under grace. And far more restitution is needed for violent theft, if restitution can ever be made at all. On the contrary, some people take whole fortunes by violence, and then give a tithe of their spoils. They live under the delusion of actually hoping to be saved.

“Giving alms in the same proportion as one’s covetousness does not cure the evil result of covetousness. If you have unjustly gotten a denarius, it is not a denarius that you need for almsgiving, to remove the sin that comes from your unjust gain, but a talent¹⁹. Therefore the thief being taken pays fourfold (Exodus 22:1), but he that spoils by violence is worse than he that steals. If the thief ought to give four times what he stole, the extortionist should give tenfold and much more. It is a big deal whether he can ever make atonement for his injustice; and just making atonement does not entitle him to any reward for almsgiving. Therefore Zacchaeus said, ‘I will restore what I have taken by false accusation fourfold, and the half of my goods I will give to the poor’ (Luke 19:8). If under the Law one ought to give fourfold, much more under grace; if he that steals pays fourfold, much more he that takes by violence.”

“Do you see why I said, ‘If you take only a denarius by violence, and pay back a talent, you barely compensate for it?’ If this is just barely compensating, when you reverse the order, and have taken by violence whole fortunes, yet bestow but little, and then not to them that have been wronged, but to others in their stead; what kind of plea will you have? What hope of salvation? Understand how bad a deed you do in so giving alms! Listen to the Scripture, ‘As one that kills the son before his father’s eyes, so is he that brings a sacrifice of the goods of the poor’” (Ecclesiasticus 34:20 LXX).

John Chrysostom went into detail²⁰ about how bad it is to give tithes and alms from ill-gotten wealth. It is like bringing a dead rotten donkey to the altar at the Temple. Like Cain, it would be better to bring no offering at all than to do this. Zacchaeus demonstrated the correct way: by restoring four times what he had taken.

“We have been cleansed once by the Baptismal font, but afterwards other ways cleanse us also. God, being merciful, has given to us various ways of reconciliation, where the first is that by almsgiving. ‘Almsgiving atones for sins’ (Ecclesiasticus 3:30 LXX). By almsgiving I do not mean that which is maintained by injustice; this is not almsgiving, but savageness and inhumanity. What is the profit in stripping one man and clothing another? We ought to begin the action with mercy, but this is inhumanity. If we give away everything that we have gotten from other people, it is no gain to us. Zacchaeus demonstrated this; he propitiated God by giving four times as much as he had taken (Luke 19:8). When we plunder without bounds, and give little, we don’t make God propitious, instead we exasperate Him. Tell me, if you dragged a dead and rotten donkey from the back alleys, and brought it to the altar, would not everyone stone you as accursed and polluted? If I prove that a sacrifice procured by plunder is more polluted than this, what defense shall we obtain? Let us suppose that some article

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 6.

¹⁹ About 6300 denarii were minted from a talent of silver.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIII, 3.

has been obtained by plunder, is it not of fouler scent than a dead donkey? Would you like to learn how great the rottenness of sin is? Listen to the Prophet saying, 'My wounds are foul and festering Because of my foolishness' (Psalm 38:5). Do you in words beg God to forget your misdeeds, yet by what you do, robbing and grasping, place your sin on the altar, and cause Him to remember them continually?"

"But this is not the only sin; there are some worse than this: you defile the souls of the saints. The altar is only a consecrated stone, but the saints carry with them Christ Himself; and do you dare to send any of such impurity there? Don't you know that if one drop of injustice falls on a great quantity of wealth, the whole is defiled? A man who throws dung into a pure fountain makes the whole fountain unclean; so also in the case of riches, anything stolen coming in makes everything tainted. We wash our hands when we enter into Church, but not our hearts. Our hands don't send out a voice, but the soul utters the words that God hears; cleanness of the body is of no use, while the soul is defiled. What does it profits, if you wipe clean your outward hands, while you have those within impure? That which subverts all good is this: while we are fearful about trifles, we don't care about important matters! To pray with unwashed hands is an indifferent matter; but to do it with an unwashed mind, this is the extreme of all evils. Listen to what was said to the Jews who busied themselves about such outward impurities. 'Wash your heart from wickedness, how long shall there be in you thoughts of your labors?' (Jeremiah 4:14) Let us also wash ourselves, not with mire, but with clean water, with almsgiving, not with covetousness. First get free from taking by force, and then start almsgiving. Let us 'decline from evil, and do good' (Psalm 37:27). Restrain your hands from covetousness, and so bring them to almsgiving. Better not to show mercy, than to show it like this; for Cain it would have been better not to have brought his offering at all. If Cain who brought too little angered God, when one gives what is another's, how shall God not be angry? 'I commanded you not to steal, and do you honor Me from that which you have stolen? What are you thinking? That I am pleased with these things?' Then He shall say to you, 'You thought wickedly that I am just like you; I will rebuke you, and set your sins before your face'" (Psalm 50:21, LXX).

In all the above, giving alms in a rote legalistic manner without love is also useless. Paul stated, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). Note that Paul states going beyond that of Zacchaeus in giving all one's goods to the poor, not just half. Giving one's body to be burned represents willingness for martyrdom in being burned alive. Yet all of this has no benefit unless it is done with love. This implies that Zacchaeus' motivation in restoring fourfold and giving half his goods was out of love for his neighbor, or Jesus would have called him on it.

Salvation Has Come to This House

As Jesus proclaimed, salvation came to Zacchaeus' house that day. The example of Zacchaeus is used by the Orthodox Church also for an annual blessing of individual houses,

room-by-room, dedicating the use of the house for the Glory of God. This follows the Lord's words, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

John Chrysostom used²¹ Zacchaeus and Matthew as examples of the kind of house that Christ will enter. Houses decked out with the things of this world are the hallmarks of the grasping and the covetous; Christ never went there during His earthly life. Houses decorated with alms, prayers, supplications and vigils, however, are decorated with the good curtains, the ones made and woven in Heaven.

"When you see great care taken about outward things, and then be ashamed. The houses of those that are rich most of all are inappropriate. When you see tables covered with hangings, and couches inlaid with silver, just as in the theater and the stage, what can be equal to this? What kind of house is most like the stage and the things on the stage: the rich man's or the poor man's? Is it not quite plain that it is the rich man's? What kind of house is most like Paul's or Abraham's? It is quite evident that it is the poor man's. To see a house's true adorning, enter into the house of Zacchaeus, and learn; when Christ was on the point of entering his house, note how Zacchaeus adorned it. He did not run to his neighbors begging curtains, seats, and chairs made of ivory; neither did he bring out from his closets Laconian hangings; but he adorned it with an adorning suitable to Christ. What was this? 'The half of my goods I will give to the poor; and whomever I have robbed, I will restore fourfold' (Luke 19:8). Let us also decorate our houses like this, that Christ may enter our house. These are the good curtains, these are made and woven in Heaven. Where these are, there is also the King of Heaven. But if you decorate it in another way, you are inviting the devil and his company."

"He also came into the house of the publican Matthew; what did Matthew do? He first adorned himself by his readiness, and by his leaving everything to follow Christ."

"So also Cornelius decorated his house with prayers and alms (Acts 10:1-2); even to this day it shines brighter than the king's palace. The vile state of a house is not in unwashed dishes lying around, or in an untidy bed, or in walls covered with smoke²², but in the wickedness of those that dwell there. Christ shows this, for into such a house, if the inhabitant is virtuous, He is not ashamed to enter; but into that other, though it has a golden roof, He will never enter. This one is more gorgeous than the king's palace, receiving the Lord of all. The one with the golden roof and columns is like filthy drains and sewers, for it contain the vessels of the devil."

"These things we have spoken not of those who are rich for a useful purpose, but of the grasping and the covetous. There is no diligence among these about needful things, but about pampering the belly, drunkenness, etc.; but with the others it is about self-restraint. Nowhere did Christ enter into a gorgeous house, but into that of the publican, the chief publican, and the fishermen, forgetting about the kings' palaces, and those that live a soft life."

²¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXXIII, 4.

²² In the houses of the poor, cooking was done indoors often without the benefit of a chimney to exhaust the smoke from the cooking fire. After a while, the walls of the house got covered with smoke residue.

“If you desire to invite Him in, deck your house with alms, prayers, supplications and vigils. These are the decorations of Christ the King, but the other ones are of mammon, the enemy of Christ. Let no one be ashamed of a humble house, if it has this furniture. Let no rich man pride himself on having a costly house, but let him rather hide his face, and seek after this other, forsaking the wealth, that both here he may receive Christ, and there enjoy the eternal tabernacles.”

Clement of Alexandria stated²³ that wealth of itself is not good or evil. Those, who have the difficulty, possess the wealth but cannot manage it and become possessed by it. Zacchaeus and Matthew had a great deal of wealth. After Christ’s call each was able to control his wealth to the benefit of others. Zacchaeus gave half his wealth to the poor while Matthew gave all his wealth to the poor.

“Those who lack the basic necessities of life are also harassed in mind; they are hindered from better things in their endeavor to provide these basic necessities and desperately search to find them from any source.”

“Much more beneficial is the opposite case: a man, who has enough to live on, is not desperate for money and who gives assistance to those who really need it! If no one had anything, no men would be able to give. This teaching may seem to conflict with many other excellent teachings of the Lord, but it doesn’t. ‘Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home’ (Luke 16:9). ‘Acquire treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, nor thieves break in and steal’ (Matthew 6:19). How could one give food to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and shelter the homeless, where Christ threatens with fire and outer darkness those who don’t, if every man first divested himself of all these things? He allowed Zacchaeus and Matthew, the rich tax-gathers, to entertain Him hospitably. He doesn’t ask them to part with their property, but, He adds, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham’ (Luke 19:9). He so praises the use of property as to command the giving a share of it; that is to give drink to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, to take the homeless in, and clothe the naked. If it is not possible to supply those needs without substance, and if He asks people to abandon their substance, the Lord would be asking people not to give, not to feed, not to take in, and not to share. This is very irrational.”

“Riches, then, which also benefit our neighbors, are not to be thrown away. They are possessions, inasmuch as they are provided by God for the use of men. They are in our hand, and under our power, as material instruments which are for good use to those who know the instrument. If you use it skillfully, it is skillful; if you are deficient in skill, it is affected by your lack of skill; but the material is itself destitute of blame. Such an instrument is wealth. Are you able to make a right use of it? It is subservient to righteousness. Does one make a wrong use of it? It is then a servant of wrong. For its nature is to be subservient, not to rule. That which of itself is neither good nor evil ought not to be blamed; the blame lies in the one who has the power of using it for good or for evil, by

²³ Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man, 12-14.

reason of his possessing voluntary choice. This is the mind and judgment of man, which has freedom in itself and self-determination in the treatment of what is assigned to it. Let no man destroy wealth; instead destroy the passions of the soul, which are incompatible with the better use of wealth. By becoming virtuous and good, he may be able to make a good use of these riches.”

The Bounty of God is Shaped by Man’s Faith

We have a role in how we receive the grace of God. It is not all cut and dried, but there exists a relationship between our Lord and His people, where He gives gifts according to our needs and abilities.

John Cassian stated²⁴ that the bounty of God is shaped according to the capacity of man’s faith. Some people Christ healed without their asking then let the spark of faith take over; others He granted healing according to their faith. In each case, our own faith is a factor.

“The manifold wisdom of God grants with manifold kindness salvation to men. He imparts the grace of His bounty to each one according to his capacity. He wills to grant His healing not according to the uniform power of His Majesty but according to the measure of the faith in which He finds each one, or as He Himself has imparted it to each one. When one believed that the will of Christ alone was sufficient for the cure of his leprosy, He healed him by the simple consent of His will, saying: ‘I am willing, be cleansed’ (Matthew 8:3). When another prayed that He would come and raise his dead daughter by laying His hands on her, He entered his house as he had hoped, and granted what was asked of Him (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43). When another believed that what was essential for his salvation depended on His command, ‘Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed’ (Matthew 8:8), He restored the limbs that were relaxed, by the power of a word, ‘Go your way, and as you have believed so be it to you’ (Matthew 8:13). To others hoping for restoration from the touch of His hem, He granted rich gifts of healing (Matthew 9:20, 14:36). To some, He bestowed remedies for their diseases²⁵. To others He healed people without their asking; others He urged on to hope, saying, ‘Do you want to be made whole?’ (John 5:6); to others when they were without hope He brought help spontaneously. He searched out the desires of some before satisfying their wants, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ (Matthew 20:32) To another who didn’t know the way to obtain what he desired, He showed it in His kindness, ‘If you believe you shall see the glory of God’ (John 11:40). Among some He poured the mighty works of His cures so richly that of them the Evangelist says, ‘He healed all their sick’ (Matthew 14:14). Among others the unfathomable depth of Christ’s beneficence was so stopped up that ‘Jesus could do there no mighty works because of their unbelief’ (Mark 6:5-6). So the bounty of God is actually shaped according to the capacity of man’s faith, so that to one it is said, ‘According to your faith let it be done to you’ (Matthew 9:29). To another, ‘Go your way, and as you have

²⁴ John Cassian, *Third Conference of Abbot Chaeremon*, II, xiii, 15.

²⁵ On a number of occasions, Jesus healed everyone who came to Him. See for example: Matthew 4:24, 8:16, 12:15, 14:14, 14:36; Luke 5:15.

believed so let it be done to you' (Matthew 8:13); to another 'Let it be to you as you desire' (Matthew 15:28); and again to another, 'Your faith has made you well'" (Luke 18:42).

Zacchaeus and Matthew responded differently to Christ; Zacchaeus responded out of free will; Matthew responded to the grace of God. Cassian described²⁶ the difference between free will and grace. In the Church, it is not one or the other, but both that are present in our lives. Zacchaeus and the Thief on the Cross both out of free will desired salvation. Paul the persecutor and Matthew the publican were both granted the grace of God while they were involved in their nefarious activities. The grace of God and free will seem opposed to each other, but really are in harmony; both belong to the rule of the Church's faith. God has granted man a free will; but if He finds that we have grown cold, He stirs us such that a good will is renewed in us. Man is capable of doing good out of his own free will; this is not always the working of grace.

"Does God have compassion on us because we have shown the beginning of a good will, or does the beginning of a good will follow because God has had compassion upon us? Many believe each of these opinions; they assert them more widely than is right, and are entangled in all kinds of opposite errors. If we say that the beginning of free will is in our own power, what about Paul the persecutor, what about Matthew the publican, of whom the one was drawn to salvation while eager for bloodshed and the punishment of the innocent, the other while eager for violence and plunder? If we say that the beginning of our free will is always due to the inspiration of the grace of God, what about the faith of Zacchaeus, or what are we to say of the goodness of the thief on the cross, who by their own desires brought violence to bear on the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 11:12) and so prevented the due reward of their vocation? If we attribute the performance of virtuous acts, and the execution of God's commands to our own will, how do we pray, 'Strengthen, O God, what You have wrought in us' (Psalm 68:28 LXX); and 'Let the brightness of the Lord our God be upon us; and do direct for us the works of our hands' (Psalm 90:17 LXX). We know that Balaam was hired to curse Israel, but we see that when he wished to curse he was not permitted to (Numbers 23:8). Abimelech was preserved from touching Rebecca and so sinning against God (Genesis 26:8). Joseph was sold by the envy of his brothers, in order to bring about the descent of the children of Israel into Egypt. While they were contemplating the death of their brother, provision was made for them against the famine to come; as Joseph shows when he makes himself known to his brethren. 'Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life' (Genesis 45:5). And again 'God sent me before you to preserve posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt' (Genesis 45:7-8). When his brothers were alarmed after the death of his father, he removed their suspicions and terror by saying, 'Fear not! Can you resist the will of God? You meant evil against me but God turned it into good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive' (Genesis 50:19-20). That this was brought about

²⁶ John Cassian, Third Conference of Abbot Chaeremon, II, xiii, 11-12.

providentially the blessed David likewise declared, ‘He called for a famine upon the land; he broke the whole support of bread. He sent a man before them; Joseph was sold for a slave’ (Psalm 105:16-17). The grace of God and free will seem opposed to each other, but really are in harmony, and ought to have both alike, lest if we withdraw one of them from man, we may seem to have broken the rule of the Church’s faith. When God sees us inclined to will what is good, He meets, guides, and strengthens us. ‘He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; When He hears it, He will answer you’ (Isaiah 30:19); and, ‘Call upon me in the day of affliction; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me’ (Psalm 50:15 LXX). And again, if He finds that we are unwilling or have grown cold, He stirs our hearts with beneficial exhortations, by which a good will is either renewed or formed in us.”

“We should not hold that God made man such that he can never will or be capable of what is good. Otherwise He has not granted him a free will. How will that first statement the Lord made about men after the fall stand, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil?’ (Genesis 3:22) We cannot think that before, he was such as to be altogether ignorant of good. Otherwise we have to admit that he was formed like some irrational beast, which is absurd and altogether alien from the Catholic faith. Moreover Solomon said, ‘God made man upright’, i.e., always to enjoy the knowledge of good only, ‘But they have sought out many devices’ (Ecclesiastes 7:29 LXX), for they came, as has been said, to know good and evil. Adam therefore after the fall conceived knowledge of evil which he didn’t have previously, but did not lose the knowledge of good which he had before. Finally Paul’s words very clearly show that mankind did not lose after the fall of Adam the knowledge of good, ‘When Gentiles, who do not have the Law, by nature do the things in the Law, these, although not having the Law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them in the day when God will judge the secrets of men’ (Romans 2:14-16). With the same meaning the Lord rebukes the unnatural but freely chosen blindness of the Jews, which they brought upon themselves, ‘Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see. Who *is* blind but My servant; or who is deaf but My messenger *whom* I send’ (Isaiah 42:18-19) That no one might ascribe this blindness of theirs to nature instead of to their own will, elsewhere He says, ‘I have brought forth the blind people; for *their* eyes are also blind, and they that have ears are deaf’ (Isaiah 43:8); and again, ‘Who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not’ (Jeremiah 5:21). The Lord also says, ‘Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand’” (Matthew 13:13).

Saving the Lost

The term “the lost” is usually, but not always, used in connection with “lost sheep” in the Scriptures. The illustration of “lost sheep” implies that the sheep was part of the fold at one time, but then wandered away. There are many terms used in the Scriptures to refer to those who are not the people of God, such as the Gentiles, idolaters, etc. The term “the lost”, however,

generally refers to those who had at one time been part of the “sheepfold”. The image of a shepherd caring for his sheep is used widely to refer to “the lost”.

Christ’s Viewpoint on the Lost

John Chrysostom went²⁷ into great detail regarding how God looks at lost sheep. He refers to them as the poor and the despised of this world and He shows great care, concern and even veneration for them. He warns that anyone who causes one of these to fall will suffer very harsh penalties. All of heaven rejoices when one of them is found. They are assigned angels to help and Christ went to the Cross on their behalf. We are even encouraged to give up our life on their behalf if necessary.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10).

“He called ‘little ones’ not those that are really little, but those that are so regarded by the multitude: the poor, the objects of contempt, the unknown. How should he be little who is equal in value to the whole world; how should he be little, who is dear to God?”

“In another way also He makes the poor to be objects of reverence, saying, ‘That their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven’”.

“From this it is clear that the saints have angels, as do all men. Paul said, ‘The woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels’ (1 Corinthians 11:10). And Moses said, ‘When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God’” (Deuteronomy 32:8 LXX).

“Here He is speaking not only of angels, but rather of angels that are greater than others. But when He said, “The face of my Father,” He means their fuller confidence, and their great honor in representing the poor in the Presence of God the Father.

When Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’” (Luke 19:10), He is putting forward another stronger reason for caring for the poor, and connects with it a parable, by which He brings in the Father as also desiring these things. ‘What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish’” (Matthew 18:12-14).

“Do you see by how many things He is urging the care of our poor brethren. Don’t say then, ‘Such a one is a blacksmith, a shoemaker, a farmer, or he is a fool’, and so despise him. In order that you should not feel this, notice by how many motives He persuades you to practice moderation, and presses you into a care for these.”

“He set a little child in their midst, and said, ‘Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LIX, 4-5.

little child like this in My Name receives Me' (Matthew 18:4-5); and, 'Whoever shall offend', shall suffer the utmost penalties. Christ started with the comparison of the 'millstone around the offender's neck'; but then He added, 'Woe to that man by whom the offense comes', and commanded us to cut off such, though they are like hands and eyes to us (Matthew 18:6-8). There are four aspects to this:

1. The angels: they are entrusted with these poor brethren; He makes the poor to be objects of veneration.
2. The Will of God: From His passion ('The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost'), He signified the Cross. Like Paul said, speaking of a brother, 'The brother for whom Christ died' (Romans 14:15).
3. The Father: He does not wish that one poor brother should perish.
4. The Shepherd: the shepherd leaves those that are safe, and seeks what is lost; and when he has found what has gone astray, he is greatly delighted at the finding and the saving of the lost sheep.

"If then God rejoices over the little one that is found, how do you despise those that are the objects of God's intense care, when one ought to give up even one's life for one of these little ones? But is he weak and poor? For this cause most of all, one ought to do everything in order to preserve him. Even He Himself left the ninety nine sheep, and went after the lost; the safety of so many was not advantageous enough to obscure the loss of one. Luke said that He even carried it on his shoulders, and that 'There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety nine just persons who need no repentance' (Luke 15:7). From His leaving those that were safe, and from His taking more pleasure in this one, He showed His great earnestness. Let us not then be careless about such souls as these. All these things are said for this object. By threatening that he who has not become a little child should not so much as set foot in the Heavens, and adding to this about 'the millstone', He has brought down the haughtiness of the boastful, since nothing is so hostile to love as pride. By saying, 'Offenses must come', He made them to be wakeful; and by adding, 'Woe to him by whom the offense comes' (Matthew 18:7), He has caused each to endeavor to avoid being offensive. By commanding to cut off those that offend He made salvation easy. By commanding us not to despise them, and not merely commanding, but with intensity ('Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones'), and by saying, 'Their angels always see the face of My Father', and, 'For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world' (John 18:37), and 'My Father wills this', He has made those who should take care of them more diligent."

"Notice what a wall He has set around them, and what intense care He takes for those that are poor and lost, threatening eternal fire to those that make them fall, and promising great blessings to them that wait on them and take care of them."

Thus the poor and the despised of this world have a very special place in Christ's heart. As the Good Shepherd (John 10), He makes it His business to care for them.

It is the Shepherd Who Is Charged with Saving the Lost

Jesus used the illustration of the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep and cares for them (John 10:1-15). He actively seeks the lost, carrying the lost sheep back home and caring for the lost sheep. The shepherd will even leave the 99, who are not lost to go find the one sheep, who is lost (Luke 15:4-5). Hired hands, who are not the owners of the sheep, are different (John 10:12-13). The Good Shepherd faces down danger to the sheep, while the hired hands are not willing to do this. The burden for saving the lost thus falls primarily on the shepherds in the Church.

The same words were used of the leaders of Israel by the Prophets. For example:

1. **Jeremiah 23:1.** God is angry with the Shepherds of Israel who destroy and scatter His sheep. They drive them away and don't attend to them; God will pay the shepherds back for what they've done.
2. **Jeremiah 50:6.** The Lord's people have been lost sheep, where the shepherds led them astray on the mountains, and the sheep have forgotten their resting place. Whoever found them devoured them; the devourers excused themselves of wrongdoing since the people had sinned against the Lord.
3. **Jeremiah 50:17.** Like scattered sheep, Israel was devoured by Assyria, then had its bones broken by Babylon.
4. **Ezekiel 34:2-12.** Ezekiel prophesied against the shepherds of Israel who fed themselves and not the flocks. They eat the meat and clothe themselves with the wool, but don't strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, or seek the lost. The sheep thus became food for the beasts of the field. The Lord will deliver His flock from their mouths and seek out His sheep Himself.
5. **Micah 2:12.** The Lord will gather His sheep like a flock in a pasture; a huge number of people.
6. **Zechariah 10:2.** The people go their way like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord is angry at the shepherds and will punish them; but He will visit His sheep.

Early Apostolic tradition²⁸, directed to the Bishops, described how the Bishops were to seek out the lost. The emphasis was on restoring the lost to where they were before they wandered away, and King David was used as an example. The Bishops were to assume the demeanor of a compassionate physician in treating the wounds of the sheep. But the Bishops were also instructed to keep an eye open for goats and for wolves dressed like sheep.

“If anyone returns and shows the fruit of repentance, receive him to prayer as the lost son, the prodigal, who had consumed his father's substance with harlots, who fed swine, and desired to be fed with husks, and could not obtain it. This son, when he repented and returned to his father, and said, ‘I have sinned against Heaven, and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son’ (Luke 15:18-19); the father, full of affection to his child, received him with music, and restored him his old robe, ring, and shoes, and slew the fatted calf, and made merry with his friends. Therefore you, O bishop, act in the same manner. As you receive a heathen²⁹ after you have instructed him, so let all join in prayers for this

²⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, II, v, 41, in Ante Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

²⁹ That is, he is treated as a heathen because he left the flock on account of some sin.

man, and restore him by imposition of hands to his ancient place among the flock, as one purified by repentance; and that imposition of hands shall be to him instead of baptism. By the laying on of our hands the Holy Spirit was given to believers. In case someone of those brethren, who had stood immovable, accuses you, because you have reconciled him, say to them, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found’ (Luke 15:31-32). That God does not only receive the penitent, but restores them to their former dignity, holy David is a sufficient witness, who, after his sin in the matter of Uriah, prayed to God, ‘Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your Guiding Spirit’ (Psalm 51:12). Again, ‘Turn Your face from my sins, and blot out all my transgressions. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me’ (Psalm 51:9-11). Therefore, as a compassionate physician, heal all that have sinned, making use of saving methods of cure; not only cutting and searing, or using antiseptics, but binding up, and using gentle healing medicines, and sprinkling comfortable words. If it is a hollow wound, or great gash, nourish it with a suitable poultice, that it may be filled up, and become even with the rest of the whole flesh. If it is infected, cleanse it with medicinal powder, that is, with the words of reproof. If it has proud flesh, cut it down with a sharp poultice — the threats of judgment. If it spreads further, sear it, and cut off the decayed flesh, mortifying him with fasting. But if after all that you have done, you perceive that from the feet to the head there will be no help from a lotion, oil, or bandage, but that the malady spreads and prevents all cure, as a gangrene which risks the entire member; then, with a great deal of consideration, and the advice of other skillful physicians, cut off the decayed member, that the whole body of the Church is not corrupted. Don’t be ready and hasty to cut off; don’t resort quickly to the saw, with its many teeth; but first use a scalpel to open the wound that the cause of the pain can be extracted. If you see anyone beyond repentance, and becoming insensible, then cut off the incurable from the Church with sorrow and lamentation. ‘So you shall put away the evil from among you’ (Deuteronomy 17:7). And, ‘Thus you shall separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness when they defile My tabernacle that is among them’ (Leviticus 15:31). And again, ‘You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s’ (Deuteronomy 1:17). And ‘You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute’” (Exodus 23:3).

Cyprian of Carthage noted³⁰ that the Old Testament gave good instruction to the shepherds of Israel – which is applicable for the Church. Seeking the lost, the sick, the broken and the exiled was a priority; those who don’t do this will be fed judgment.

What is a greater or a more worthwhile care for overseers, than to provide for cherishing and preserving the sheep by diligent solicitude and wholesome medicine? The Lord speaks, ‘The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, those driven away you have

³⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Father Stephanus, LXVI, 4.

not brought back, the lost you have not sought. My sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the beasts of the field; no one searched for or sought after them. Thus said the Lord, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hands, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock. The shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver the sheep from their mouth; and I will feed the shepherds with judgment' (Ezekiel 34:4-6, 10, 16 LXX). Since the Lord threatens such shepherds by whom the Lord's sheep are neglected and perish, what else ought we to do, dearest brother, than to exhibit full diligence in gathering together and restoring the sheep of Christ, and to apply the medicine of paternal affection to cure the wounds of the lapsed. The Lord also warns in the Gospel, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those that are sick' (Matthew 9:12). Although we are many shepherds, yet we feed one flock, and ought to collect and cherish all the sheep which Christ by His blood and passion sought for. We shouldn't allow our begging and mourning brethren to be cruelly despised and trodden down by the haughty presumption of some. It is written, 'The one who is drunk and the scoffer, the man who boasts, shall accomplish nothing; he widened his soul as the grave, and as death he is never satisfied' (Habakkuk 2:5 OSB LXX). The Lord blames and condemns men of that kind, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God' (Luke 16:15). He says that those are execrable and detestable who please themselves, who, swelling and inflated, arrogantly assume anything to themselves.

Cyprian and the African Synod drafted³¹ a letter encouraging the priests into greater care for their sheep. They faced severe hardship and persecution, resulting in many lost sheep, who were unable to stand up to the persecution. The practice of refusing to accept the lapsed³² back into the fold, Cyprian called "cruel hardness" and "denying peace". Accepting them back into the fold, usually with a term of penitence, Cyprian called pastoral care and paternal mercy.

"If a man forsakes everything that he has, dwelling in hiding-places and in solitude, what if he shall fall by chance among thieves, or die in fever and in weakness? Will it not be charged to us that so good a soldier, who has forsaken all that he has, leaving his house, his parents, and his children (Matthew 19:29), has preferred to follow his Lord, but dies without peace and without communion? Either inactive negligence or cruel hardness will be ascribed to us in the Day of Judgment. Pastors though we are, we have not been willing to take care of the sheep trusted and committed to us in peace, or to arm them in battle. We hope that this charge will not be brought against us by the Lord, 'You feed on the milk, clothe yourself with the wool, and kill them that are fattened; but you do not feed My flock. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, those driven away you have not brought back, the

³¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle to Father Cornelius*, LIII, 4-5.

³² The "lapsed" were those who succumbed under intense persecution into denying Christ. There were some in the Church that felt that the "lapsed" should be excommunicated because they denied Christ. Others like Cyprian and all the African Bishops who drafted this letter felt that the "lapsed" should be treated like lost sheep.

lost you have not sought. My sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the beasts of the field; no one searched for or sought after them. Thus said the Lord, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hands, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock. The shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver the sheep from their mouth; I will feed the shepherds with judgment” (Ezekiel 34:3-6, 10, 16 LXX).

“The sheep committed to us by the Lord will be demanded back from our mouth, when we deny peace, when we give them human cruelty rather than divine and paternal love. We have determined this by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit and the admonition of the Lord, conveyed by many clear visions. The enemy is shown to be at hand. We need to gather within the camp the soldiers of Christ, to examine the cases of each one, and to grant peace to the lapsed, and to furnish arms to those who are about to fight. This, we trust, will please you in contemplation of the paternal mercy. But if there is any one of our colleagues who thinks that peace should not be granted to our brothers and sisters, he shall give an account to the Lord in the Day of Judgment, either of his grievous rigor or of his inhuman hardness.”

Cyprian received³³ a letter from the Bishops of Rome during a particularly intense persecution of Carthage by Decius in c. 250 AD, where Cyprian had fled for his life. During his year of concealment Cyprian wrote many letters to the clergy at Rome and at Carthage. This letter from Rome was a reminder that the Bishop’s job is a shepherd of the flock in good times and in bad. The Bishop especially needs to encourage those brethren facing death and martyrdom (which Cyprian was doing from his place of hiding).

“We who are placed in the place of a shepherd keep watch over the flock. If we are found neglectful, it will be said to us, as it was said to our predecessors also, that ‘we have not sought that which was lost, and have not brought back the one driven away, and have not bound up that which was broken, but have fed on the milk, and been clothed with the wool’ (Ezekiel 34:3-4 LXX). The Lord Himself, fulfilling what had been written in the Law and the Prophets, teaches, ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them’ (John 10:11-12). To Simon, too, He speaks, ‘Do you love Me? Peter answered, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed my sheep’ (John 21:17). We know that this saying arose out of the very circumstance of Peter’s withdrawal, and the rest of the disciples did likewise.”

“We are unwilling, beloved brethren, that you should be found hirelings, but we desire you to be good shepherds, since you are aware that no slight danger threatens you if you do not exhort our brethren to stand steadfast in the faith. The brotherhood needs to be rooted out of those who rush headlong into idolatry. We exhort you to do this not in word only. You will be able to ascertain from very many who come to you from us, that we both have done and still do all these things ourselves with great worldly risk. We have before our eyes the fear of God

³³ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, II, 1-2.

and eternal sufferings rather than the fear of men and a short-lived discomfort. We do not forsake the brethren, but exhort them to stand firm in the faith, and to be ready to go to be with the Lord.”

“The Church stands in faith, although some have been driven to fall by terror of persecution, whether they were persons of eminence, or they were afraid, when seized, with the fear of man. These, however, we did not abandon, although they were separated from us, but exhorted them, and continue to exhort them, to repent, if in any way they may receive pardon from Him who is able to grant it. If we deserted them, they might become worse.”

The Church Fathers Interpret the Scriptures on “the Lost”

Let us consider what some of the well-known Church Fathers have had to say about “the lost”.

Tertullian stated³⁴ that the lost have been allowed to proceed to their condition in order that the grace of God may be revealed.

“We know by experience the goodness of God; from Christ we learn that He is the only God, and is very good. He requires from us love to our neighbor after love to Himself, in order that He will Himself do that which He has commanded. He will love the flesh which is so very closely and in so many ways His neighbor. He will love it, although infirm, since His strength is made perfect in weakness. He will love it although disordered, since ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick’ (Luke 5:31). He will love it although not honorable, since ‘we bestow greater honor on those members of the body that we think are less honorable’ (1 Corinthians 12:23). He will love it although ruined, since ‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10). He will love it although sinful, since He says, ‘I desire rather the salvation of the sinner than his death’ (Ezekiel 18:23 loosely). He will love it although condemned, for says He, ‘I will strike down, and I will heal’ (Deuteronomy 32:39). Why reproach the flesh with those conditions which wait for God, which hope in God, which receive honor from God, which He aids? If such casualties as these had never happened to the flesh, the bounty, the grace, the mercy, and all the beneficent power of God, would have had no opportunity to work.”

Athanasius of Alexandria stated³⁵ that Christ sought to elevate the understanding of the lost to recognition above that of animals and fools. One who is lost can’t just listen in order to be saved; he also has to follow through with corresponding deeds.

“Christ the Word, the lover of mankind, came that He might seek and find that which was lost. He sought to restrain people from the folly of being hearers only and not doers of the Commandments of our Lord. Since evil doers have deprived themselves, He cries out and says, ‘Don’t be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle’

³⁴ Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 9.

³⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, II, 3.

(Psalm 32:9). Thus, being changed into the likeness of fools, they fell so low in their understanding, that by their excessive reasoning, they even likened the Divine Wisdom to themselves, in their own abilities. Therefore, ‘professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, and creeping things. Therefore God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting’ (Romans 1:22-23, 28). They did not listen to the prophetic voice that reproved them, ‘To whom then will you liken God; what likeness will you compare to Him?’ (Isaiah 40:18) David prayed concerning such as these, ‘Those that make the idols are like them, as well as all those who put their trust in them’ (Psalm 115:8). Being blind to the truth they looked on a stone as if it were God; like senseless creatures, they walked in darkness. The prophet cried, ‘They hear, but they do not understand; they see, but they do not perceive; for their heart has grown insensitive, and their ears hear with difficulty’” (Isaiah 6:9 OSB LXX).

Gregory of Nyssa addressed³⁶ a heresy of Eunomius that stated that only half of man – his body – was lost, not his soul. Gregory shows that both soul and body are lost and then saved, but not necessarily at the same time.

“Their impiety concerning the Incarnation states that Christ only saved half of man, not the whole man; i.e. only the body. Their object is to show that some statements, which our Lord utters in his humanity, have issued from the Godhead Itself. The sacred Scriptures do not say that Christ took on Himself flesh only without a soul. The Lord came ‘to seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10). Now it was not just the body, but the whole man, soul and body, that was lost. More exactly, the soul was lost first. For disobedience is a sin, not of the body, but of the will; and the will properly belongs to the soul, from which the whole disaster of our nature had its beginning. In Eden, God had threatened that if Adam and Eve should eat of the forbidden fruit, death would follow the act. The condemnation of man was twofold: death affects each part of our nature: body and soul. The death of the body consists in loss of sense and the decay of the body. ‘The soul that sins shall die’ (Ezekiel 18:20). Sin is alienation from God, Who is the true and only life. The first man lived many hundred years after his disobedience, and yet God did not lie when He said, ‘In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ (Genesis 2:17). In Adam’s alienation from the true life, the sentence of death came on him that same day; after this, at a much later time, the bodily death of Adam occurred. He Who came that He might seek and save that which was lost, that which the shepherd in the parable calls the sheep, both finds that which is lost and carries home on His shoulders the whole sheep, not just its skin. He desires to make the man of God complete, united to the Deity in body and in soul. He Who was in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin, left no part of our nature which He did not take on Himself.”

Tertullian phrased it differently; he noted³⁷ that man’s soul is immortal, while it is his flesh that dies and is subject to destruction. Salvation then affects man’s flesh, not his soul. By saving man’s flesh, the entire man will be saved.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 13.

“Christ said He came to ‘to seek and to save that which is lost’ (Luke 19:10). What do you suppose it is that is lost? It is the entire man, not just a part of him. In fact, since the transgression which caused man’s ruin was committed by the instigation of the soul from lust, it has marked the entire man with the sentence of transgression, and has therefore made him deserve perdition. He can be wholly saved, since he has by sinning been wholly lost. The sheep (of the parable) was ‘lost’ bodily; its recovery is also made bodily. Body as well as soul makes up the entire animal, which was carried on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd; we have here unquestionably an example how man is restored in both his natures. Otherwise the devil can be understood to be stronger for injuring man, ruining him wholly, and God must be comparatively weak, since He does not relieve and help man in his entire state.”

“Paul suggests that ‘where sin abounded, grace abounded much more’ (Romans 5:20). How can man be regarded as saved, if he is lost in the flesh, but saved as to his soul? We understand the soul’s immortality as to believe it ‘lost’, not in the sense of destruction, but of punishment, that is, in hell. If this is the case, then it is not the soul which salvation affects, since it is ‘safe’ already in its own nature by reason of its immortality. Rather salvation affects the flesh, which, as all readily allow, is subject to destruction. Man will therefore be saved in the substance in which he does not perish, and yet obtain salvation in that in which he does perish. You have then the restoration of the entire man, inasmuch as the Lord purposes to save that part of him which perishes, while man will not lose that portion which cannot be lost.”

Zacchaeus in the Years after Pentecost

According to tradition³⁸, Zacchaeus accompanied the Apostle Peter on his travels for a while and was later ordained Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine. After the death of Zacchaeus in the late 40’s AD, Cornelius (Acts 10:1-4) was ordained³⁹ Bishop of Caesarea in Zacchaeus’ place. Little else is known about him except that he died in peace in Caesarea.

In the years between Deacon Philip’s conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-8) and Peter’s escape from prison (Acts 12:1-11), or between 32 and 44 AD, Zacchaeus was with the Apostle Peter at least part time according to tradition⁴⁰. He was present in Caesarea for the Apostle Peter’s debate⁴¹ with the infamous heretic Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-20), where Barnabus, Clement of Rome and Clement’s brothers Nicetas and Aquila were also present.

Rufinus of Aquileia, in translating the Recognitions of Clement of Rome, stated⁴² that the Apostle Peter ordained many Bishops during his lifetime to govern cities in which he lived. In

³⁷ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, II, vi, 34.

³⁸ <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?SID=4&ID=1&FSID=148976>

³⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VII, iv, 46, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7*.

⁴⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, VI, ii, 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7*.

⁴¹ For more details about Peter’s encounters with Simon Magus, see Mark Kern, *Simon Magus the Heresiarch*, St Athanasius Press, Goleta, CA, 2004

⁴² Rufinus of Aquileia, *Preface to the Books of Recognitions of Clement of Rome*.

Caesarea, for example, Peter ordained Zacchaeus as Bishop of Caesarea while Peter was living there.

“Clement of Rome wrote a letter to James the Lord’s brother, giving an account of the death of Peter, saying that Peter had left him as his successor, as ruler and teacher of the Church. Linus and Cletus were Bishops of the city of Rome before Clement. How then, some men ask, can Clement in his letter to James say that Peter passed over to him his position as a Church-teacher? The explanation is as follows. Linus and Cletus were Bishops in the city of Rome before Clement, but this was in Peter’s life-time; that is, they took charge of the Episcopal work, while he discharged his duties as an Apostle. He is known to have done the same thing at Caesarea; though he was himself on the spot, yet he had at his side Zacchaeus whom he had ordained as Bishop. Thus we may see how both things may be true; namely how Linus and Cletus stand as predecessors of Clement in the list of Bishops, and yet how Clement after the death of Peter became his successor in the teacher’s chair.”

THE ROLE OF BISHOPS

January 26, 2014
32nd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: 1 Timothy 4:9-15

Today's Epistle lesson is not used at all in the West for Sunday services. Going back about 50 years, many Western churches had Scripture readings for Matins and Vespers and today's Epistle reading was included. But these readings are falling largely into disuse today. Looking through the old lectionaries (from the 1940's) of Western churches, virtually every verse from 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus (the Pastoral Epistles) was read either at the weekday services or during Sunday services. With the passing of Matins and Vespers, the main theme that is now missing in Western churches is that of bishops and the role of bishops in the Church.

For example, Table 1 lists the Sunday lectionary for most Western churches (going back at least to the 1940's) that is used today. Table 2 lists the weekday lectionary for some Western churches that is starting to fall into disuse. Note how much the themes in Table 2 revolve around the Bishop's role in the Church.

Background: Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus

Paul first met Timothy in Lystra and Timothy was well spoken of by the brethren there and at Iconium (Acts 16:1-4). While this occurred at the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey (49 AD) or right after the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), Paul probably met Timothy on his first missionary journey². Timothy may have been among the elders (or presbyters) Paul and Barnabas appointed at the end of their first missionary journey in 48 AD (Acts 14:23).

Lystra was not Timothy's first contact with Christianity either. Titus was numbered among the original Seventy who were sent out by the Lord two-by-two to heal the sick and cast out demons (Luke 10:1-24). Timothy was added to the number of the Seventy later. Timothy had probably been a believer for a while when Paul met him.

Paul's first letter to Timothy was written in about 64-65 AD, or following Paul's release from house arrest in Rome; that is, after the end of Acts 28. During the intervening years 48-64 AD, Timothy had accompanied Paul on all his missionary journeys doing Apostolic work (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3, Acts 19:22, 1 Corinthians 4:17).

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² Compare 2 Timothy 3:10-11 where Paul referred to events of his First Missionary Journey that Timothy was very familiar with.

Table 1
Pastoral Epistles Used in the West for Sundays

Scripture		Theme (OSB Title)
1 Timothy	1:12-17	Salvation by Grace
1 Timothy	2:1-7	Faithfulness in Prayer
1 Timothy	6:6-19	Greed; Pursuing Spirituality
2 Timothy	1:1-14	Thanksgiving; Timothy's Gift
2 Timothy	2:8-15	Strengthening Others, Diligence
2 Timothy	3:14-4:5	Inspiration of Scripture, Sound Doctrine
2 Timothy	4:6-8, 16-18	Paul's Example and Trials
Titus	2:11-14	Proper Behavior
Titus	3:4-7	God's Kindness to Us

Table 2
Pastoral Epistles Omitted in the West for Sundays

Scripture		Theme
1 Timothy	1:1-12	Opposing Speculation & Legalism as Bishop
1 Timothy	1:18-20	Wage Good Warfare as Bishop
1 Timothy	2:8-15	Men's & Women's Roles
1 Timothy	3:1-16	Bishops' & Deacons' Qualifications
1 Timothy	4:1-5:25	A Bishop's Work
1 Timothy	6:1-5	Regarding Slaves & Disputers
2 Timothy	2:1-7, 16-26	Apostolic Teaching, Conduct & Oral Traditions
2 Timothy	3:1-4:5	Moral Decline & the Bishop's Response
2 Timothy	4:9-15	The Role of Bishops
Titus	1:1-16	Ordination of Bishops; Opposing False Teachers
Titus	2:1-10	Sound Doctrine & Behavior
Titus	3:1-3	Kindness
Titus	3:8-15	Heretics & Schismatics vs. Other Apostles

Paul had recently left Timothy in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3) to set some things straight. The words Paul used for Timothy's mission there are very strong. Paul describes qualifications and characteristics of a bishop for Timothy's benefit (1 Timothy 3:1-7); this implies that Timothy ordained other bishops in the area. Paul knew many of these things didn't apply to Timothy himself, but they very well may apply if Timothy, himself, was ordaining Bishops. Timothy remained Bishop of Ephesus until about 95 AD when he was martyred. Shortly after Timothy's martyrdom, the Apostle John returned from a 15 year exile on Patmos and ordained Onesimus, Philemon's former slave (Philemon 10), as bishop in Timothy's place. Tradition credits Aquila (also one of the Seventy) as the first Bishop of Ephesus beginning in 52 AD during Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:18-19). Gaius (also of the Seventy) was the second Bishop of Ephesus; he, like Timothy, traveled with Paul a lot (Romans 16:23, Acts 19:29, 20:4).

The Role of Bishops

The Epistle reading begins, literally, “Faithful is the Word and worthy of all acceptance” (1 Timothy 1:9). In verse 11, Paul instructed Timothy, “These things command⁴³ and teach” (1 Timothy 1:11). The Greek word *paragello* comes from the Greek word *agellos* meaning “angel” and an adverb meaning near or close. Thus Paul is saying that Timothy’s work in Ephesus is the Word of God coming to the Ephesians as in an angelic visit. These are strong words; it’s not something that’s optional whether they receive it or not⁴⁴.

When Paul wrote this, Timothy was at least in his late 30’s. Yet Paul encourages Timothy, “Let no one despise your youthfulness” (1 Timothy 1:12). Perhaps some of the older men in Ephesus had other ideas on how things should be run. The same word *paragello* is also used later (1 Timothy 6:17) where Timothy was instructed to command those who are rich not to be haughty or arrogant.

Ignatius of Antioch (martyred c. 107 AD) wrote⁴⁵ very similar words to the Church in Magnesia, reminding them that the honor paid to the Bishop is actually paid to God the Father.

“And it is fitting for you not to take advantage of the bishop’s youth (cf. 1 Timothy 4:12), but to render him full respect in accordance with the power of God the Father, just as I know that the holy presbyters have not presumed upon his youthful external appearance but, as men wise in God, yield to him – not to him but to the Father of Jesus Christ, to the bishop of all. For the honor of him who loved us, it is fitting for us to obey without any hypocrisy; for a man does not deceive only this visible bishop but also cheats the invisible one. The reckoning of this account is not with flesh but with God, who knows men’s secrets”. For more discussion on this topic, see the special Feast Day for Hierarchs.

Ignatius also wrote that the purpose of the Bishops is the purpose of the Lord Jesus; subjecting oneself to the Bishops represents living not in human fashion.

“For Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, is the expressed purpose⁴⁶ of the Father, just as the bishops who have been appointed throughout the world exist by the purpose of Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:2). “For when you subject⁴⁷ yourselves to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, you appear to me to be living not in human fashion but like Jesus Christ, who died for us so that by believing in His death you might escape dying” (Trallians 2:1).

If these are hard words for people of the 21st Century to consider, Ignatius goes on⁴⁸ with more:

“Similarly all are to respect the deacons as Jesus Christ and the bishop as a copy of the Father and the presbyters as the Council of God and the band of

⁴³ “Command” is the Greek word *paragello*; “teach” is the Greek word *didasko*.

⁴⁴ The same word *paragello*, is also used in 1 Timothy 1:3, 1:5, 1:18, 5:7, 6:13, 6:17.

⁴⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, III, 1-2.

⁴⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, III, 2.

⁴⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, II, 1.

⁴⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians*, III, 1-2.

Apostles. For apart from these no group can be called a Church. I am convinced you accept this. For I have received an embodiment of your love, and have it with me, in your bishop, whose demeanor is a great lesson and whose gentleness is his power. I think that even the godless revere him” (Trallians 3:1-2).

Paul particularly instructed Timothy to give attention to the reading, the exhortation and the teaching (Greek: *didaskalia*). The word translated “the reading” (Greek: *anagnosis* meaning knowledge through repetition) is used only two other places in the New Testament (Acts 13:15, 2 Corinthians 3:14). Both other places clearly refer to the Reading of the Scriptures in the synagogues. In addition, following the Reading of the Scriptures, both the Law and the Prophets in Acts 13:15, the synagogue ruler asked Paul if he had a word of exhortation for the people. Thus “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13) is clearly referring to various aspects of the liturgical worship and teaching in the Church in Ephesus. Timothy was evidently gifted in these areas (1 Timothy 4:14-15) and the whole tone of Paul’s letter is encouragement for Timothy to be bold about it.

One might observe that both Paul’s and Ignatius’ letters are rather authoritarian in terms of the bishops’ charge to command and direct the activities of the Church. It is true that democratic principles such as majority rule and checks and balances seem to be missing. Church government is a matter for everyone to discern what the Will of God is and not to focus only on what is the will of the majority. We in the West would do well to pay close attention to the readings from Table II that our culture has not heard much.

Old Testament Instructions on the Role of Bishops

To see where the tradition of the authority of Bishops came from, one needs to look to the Old Testament. For more study on this topic, see the Study on Hierarchs in the Church.

Early Christian tradition applied⁴⁹ the Old Testament instructions for the government of Israel to the Bishops of the Church. The Bishops were the shepherds of the Lord’s flock and they needed to take this matter seriously to provide proper care for the people of God, and the Bishops will be judged on what they have done about this at Judgment Day. The Bishop needs to truly love his flock, when he does so, the people will love him in return. He needs to actively seek out the lost sheep; in doing this, the Bishop will become a source of healing and mercy for the lost. In all this, nothing is mentioned about any efforts for the Bishop to attempt to convert wolves into sheep.

General Instructions to the Bishops

“Let the Bishop extend his concern to all sorts of people: to those who have not offended, that they may continue innocent; to those who offend, that they may repent. To the Bishop does the Lord speak, ‘Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones’ (Matthew 18:10). It is the duty of the Bishop to give remission to the penitent. As soon as anyone who has offended says, in the sincerity of his soul, ‘I have sinned against the Lord’ the Holy Spirit answers, ‘The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die’ (2 Samuel 12:13). Be

⁴⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”, II, iii, 18-20 in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

sensible, O Bishop, of the dignity of your place, that as you have received the power of binding, so you also have received that of loosing. Having therefore the power of loosing, know yourself, and behave yourself in this world as becomes your place, being aware that you have a great account to give. 'For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required' (Luke 12:48). No man is free from sin, excepting Him that was made man for us. It is written, 'Who shall be pure from uncleanness? Not even one; even if his life should be but one day upon the earth' (Job 14:4 LXX). On this account the lives and conduct of the ancient holy men and patriarchs are described; not that we may reproach them from our reading, but that we ourselves may repent, and have hope that we also shall obtain forgiveness. Their blemishes are to us both security and admonition, because we learn from them when we have offended, that if we repent we shall have pardon. It is written, 'Who can boast that he has a pure heart? Who dares affirm that he is pure from sin?' (Proverbs 20:9 LXX) No man is without sin. Do you labor to the utmost of your power to be blameless, inquiring about all the parts of your flock, lest anyone is outraged on your account, and thereby perishes? The layman asks only for himself, but the Bishop speak for everyone, as having a greater burden, and carrying a heavier load. It is written, 'The Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, you and your sons and your father's house shall bear the sins of the holy things, and you and your sons shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood' (Numbers 18:1 LXX). Since the Bishop has to give an account for everyone, take care of everyone. Preserve those that are sound, admonish those that sin; and when you have afflicted them with fasting, give them ease by remission. When the offender begs the Bishop with tears for readmission, receive him, and let the whole Church pray for him. When you have admitted him by imposition of your hand, give him permission to remain in the flock. But for the lethargic and the careless, endeavor to convert, confirm, warn and cure them, understanding how great a reward you shall have for doing so, and how great danger you will incur if you are negligent."

Ezekiel Speaks to the Bishops

"Ezekiel speaks to those overseers who don't take care of the people. 'Thus says the Lord God; O shepherds of Israel, do shepherds feed themselves? Do not the shepherds feed the sheep? Behold, you feed on the milk, and clothe yourselves with the wool, and slay the fat; but you don't feed My sheep. The weak ones you have not strengthened, the sick you have not cherished, the bruised you have not bound up, the stray one you have not turned back, the lost you have not sought; and the strong you have worn out with labor. My sheep were scattered, because there were no shepherds; they became food to all the wild beasts of the field' (Ezekiel 34:2-5). And again, 'The shepherds did not search for My sheep; the shepherds fed themselves, but they did not feed My sheep' (Ezekiel 34:8). A little later, 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My sheep at their hands, and cause them to cease from feeding My sheep. The shepherds shall not feed themselves any more; and I will deliver My sheep out of their mouth, and the sheep shall no longer be food for them' (Ezekiel 34:10). He also adds, speaking to the people, 'Behold, I will judge between sheep and sheep, and between rams and rams. Is it not enough for you that you fed on the good

pasture, that you trampled with your feet the remnant of your pasture? You drank the standing water; you disturbed the residue with your feet? So My sheep fed on that which you had trampled with your feet!’ (Ezekiel 34:17-19) A little later He adds, ‘They shall know that I am the Lord their God, and they are My people. O house of Israel, you are the sheep of My flock, and I am the Lord your God’” (Ezekiel 30-31).

“Listen Bishops; pay attention, you of the laity, how God speaks: ‘I will judge between ram and ram, and between sheep and sheep’. He says to the shepherds, ‘You shall be judged for your lack of skill, and for destroying the sheep’. That is, I will judge between one Bishop and another, between one lay person and another, and between one ruler and another. What this means is that a lay person might say, I am a sheep and not a shepherd; I am not concerned about myself. Let the shepherd pay attention to that, for he alone will be required to give an account for me. However, just as the sheep that will not follow its good shepherd is exposed to the wolves to its destruction; so that sheep who follows a bad shepherd is also exposed to unavoidable death, since his bad shepherd will devour him. We must take care to avoid destructive shepherds.”

The Love of the Bishop

“As to a good shepherd, let the lay person honor him, love him, reverence him as his Lord, as his master, as the high priest of God, as a teacher of piety. He that hears the Bishop, hears Christ; and he that rejects him, rejects Christ; and he who does not receive Christ, does not receive His God and Father (Luke 10:16). In like manner, let the Bishop love the laity as his own children, fostering and cherishing them with affectionate diligence, like a bird cherishes her eggs, in order to hatch young ones. Let him admonish all men; reproofing all who stand in need of reproof; reproofing, but not striking; putting down arrogance, but not overthrowing them; warning them to assist their conversion; chiding them to affect their reformation and better course of life. Let the Bishop watch the strong; that is, keeping him firm in the faith that is already strong; feeding the people peacefully. Let him strengthen the weak, confirming with exhortation that which is tempted; healing that which is sick, curing by instruction that which is weak in the faith through doubtfulness of mind. Let him bind up that which is broken, binding up by comfortable admonitions that which is gone astray, wounded, bruised, or broken by their sins. By doing this he will give hope, restoring it in strength to the Church, bringing it back into the flock. Let the Bishop bring back that which is driven away; that is, not permitting that which is in its sins, and is cast out by way of punishment, to continue excluded. Let him receive it, and bring it back, restoring it to the flock, to the people of the undefiled Church. Let him seek for that which is lost; the Bishop should not allow anyone to perish, even if they desponds of their salvation, because of the multitude of its offenses. Let him search for that which has grown sleepy, drowsy, and sluggish, and that which is not mindful of its own life, through the depth of its sleep. People who have drifted to a great distance from their own flock, may be in danger of falling among the wolves, and being devoured by them. Let the Bishop bring them back by admonition, exhorting them to be watchful; let him insinuate hope, not permitting it to say that which was said by some: ‘Our errors and our lawlessness

are upon us, and we waste away in them. So how can we then live?’ (Ezekiel 33:10) As far as possible, let the Bishop make the offense his own, and say to the sinner, ‘If you will only return, I will undertake to suffer death for you, as our Lord suffered death for me, and for all men’. ‘The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, that is, the devil, and he leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them’” (John 10:11-12).

The Mercy of the Bishop

“We know that God is very merciful to those who have offended, and has promised to accept our repentance. But he who has offended, who is unacquainted with this promise of God concerning repentance, who does not understand His long-suffering and forbearance, and who is ignorant of the Holy Scriptures, inasmuch as he has never learned them from you, perishes through his folly. Like a compassionate shepherd, and a diligent feeder of the flock, search out, and keep an account of your flock. Seek what is straying (Matthew 18:12); as the Lord God our gracious Father has sent His own Son, the good Shepherd, our Master Jesus. He has commanded Him, ‘Leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until you find it. And when He has found it, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ (Luke 15:4-6). In like manner, be obedient, O Bishop, and seek that which was lost, guide that which has wandered out of the right way, bring back that which is gone astray. You have authority to bring them back, and to deliver those that are broken-hearted by remission. Through you our Savior says to him who is discouraged under the sense of his sins, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ (Luke 5:20); your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction’ (Mark 5:34). This peace is the Church of Christ, into which you restore them, when you have loosed them from their sins, as now being sound and blameless, of good hope, diligent, laborious in good works. As a skillful and compassionate physician, heal all who have wandered in the ways of sin; for ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick’ (Matthew 9:12); and the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10). Since you are a physician in the Lord’s Church, provide remedies suitable to every patient’s case. Heal them by all means possible; restore them sound to the Church. Feed the flock, ‘not with insolence and contempt, as lording it over them’ (Matthew 20:25, Ezekiel 34:4 loosely) but as a gentle shepherd, ‘gathering the lambs into your bosom, and gently leading those which are with young’” (Isaiah 40:11 LXX).