

THE APOSTLE JOHN

The Beloved Apostle

Perfecting the Love of God in Us

The Apostle John
September 26, 2017

GOSPEL: John 19:25-27, 21:24-25

EPISTLE: 1 John 4:12-19

BACKGROUND: THE LIFE OF JOHN

John's Family

John, son of Zebedee, and his brother, James were the grandsons of Joseph, the betrothed of the Virgin Mary. John's mother, Salome, was one of the myrrh-bearing women. She was also Jesus' stepsister and was a very close confidante of the Virgin Mary. It was quite natural for the Lord to entrust the care of His mother to John at the cross (John 19:25-27) since Mary and Salome were such close friends. Throughout John's Gospel, he refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20) and this is the subject of the Gospel lesson. John was probably the youngest of the 12. Being Jesus' relative (either step-nephew or second cousin, once removed), he was treated very tenderly by the Lord (John 13:23-25).

John was one of a number of the Twelve Apostles who were fishermen by trade. This included his brother James, Thomas, Nathanael, Peter and Andrew, plus others (John 21:2). His father, Zebedee, ran the fishing business, and there were a number of hired servants who helped with the day-to-day tasks (Mark 1:19-20). Most of the fish caught were taken to the city of Magdala for salting to preserve freshness, but some fish were sold fresh locally. Fish was a major part of the diet of 1st Century Palestine, and fresh fish commanded a very good price. Recent studies of the operations of the 1st Century fishing industry indicate that the owner of a fishing business had a good income, equivalent to upper middle class today. For more details about the 1st Century fishing industry see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish, Fishers of Men", Bible Review, June 1999, pp. 22-27, 48. John's mother, Salome, was not mentioned by name as one of the chief supporters of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 8:2-3). However, she was very closely connected to Jesus' ministry (Matthew 20:20-22), and was present at the foot of the Cross and at the Tomb (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:56). From this we can conclude with reasonable certainty that she was one of the lesser supporters of Jesus' ministry, and that she was not as wealthy as Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna (Luke 8:2-3).

John's family owned property in Jerusalem, and John had his own home (John 19:27) which was located on Mt. Zion according to tradition (Holy Apostles Convent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, p. 417). During Jesus' crucifixion, John was known to the high priest, Caiaphas, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. It is uncertain whether Caiaphas knew John because he was of priestly descent or because of his family wealth. John then went out and spoke to the doorkeeper to let Peter in also (John 18:13-16). John, however, was spared the inquisition that Peter received (John 18:17-27).

The Jewish rulers, elders and Scribes described the fishermen-turned-Apostles as uneducated and untrained men. This group of Jewish leaders included Annas and Caiaphas (Acts 4:5-13), where the priests and the high priest were from among the Sadducees, who did not believe in a bodily resurrection (Luke 20:27). “Uneducated and untrained” does not mean unintelligent, but only refers to formal training in the Mosaic Law, philosophy and oratory. As a result, these Sadducees marveled that Peter and John, who had no training in oratory, were very eloquent in proclaiming the resurrection of Christ (Acts 4:13).

Accompanying the Lord

John was among Jesus’ “inner circle”, with Peter and James (John’s brother). He was prominent at a number of events during Jesus’ public ministry:

- At the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31).
- As an Apostle at the ordination of the Twelve (Mark 3:17).
- At the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:35-37).
- At the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2, Luke 9:28).
- Rebuking someone who cast out demons, but who did not follow Christ (Luke 9:49).
- With his brother James, seeking to call down fire from heaven just like Elijah (2 Kings 1:10-12) on a Samaritan village that wouldn’t receive them (Luke 9:54).
- With James and Salome, asking for the highest place in the Kingdom. This caused the other ten Apostles to be greatly displeased with John and James (Matthew 20:20-24, Mark 10:35-41).
- Asking for private clarification of future events (Mark 13:3).
- Sent ahead by Jesus to prepare the Passover and Last Supper (Luke 22:8).
- Asking Jesus who would betray Him at Peter’s request (John 13:23-26).
- With Peter and James in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-33).
- As the only one of the Twelve at the Cross, where Jesus assigned to him the care of His mother as a son would normally do (John 19:26-27).
- With Peter, following Jesus after His arrest, and gaining entrance to Annas’ house (John 18:15-16).

Jesus nicknamed John and his brother James “the Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17) due to their desire to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that would not receive Jesus (Luke 9:51-56). On the other hand, his Epistles portray him as a gentle old man who emphasized love among the brethren. This is the subject of the Epistle lesson.

John certainly had a desire to understand the depths of the Kingdom of God, and this was reflected in his life. Besides asking for the highest place in the Kingdom (Matthew 20:20-24, Mark 10:35-41), he was very intimate with Christ and recognized some things quicker than the other Apostles. For example, at the tomb, John recognized that the Lord had risen even though they did not understand yet that this is what the Scriptures said (John 20:2-9). He was also first to recognize the Risen Christ at the Sea of Galilee while they were fishing (John 21:6-7). Because of this intimacy, John became known as “the disciple that Jesus loved” (John 21:7, 20). This is not to say that Jesus loved no one else, but that Jesus loved John in a special manner. As part of this intimacy, the Lord showed John many things about the goings-on in heaven and about what will happen in the future. John was even caught up to heaven to see some of these things himself (Revelation 1:10-11, 4:1-11).

John came to be known in later centuries by the name, John the Theologian. This was due to widespread circulation of his Gospel, with an accompanying understanding of the depth of the mystery of God revealed in his writings, which include a Gospel, three Epistles and Revelation.

John lived his entire life in celibacy, as did a number of the Apostles and the Virgin Mary. In doing this, their concentration was on fasting, prayer, overcoming the passions of the flesh and on understanding the Will of God every moment of their lives.

At the end of John's Gospel, he dispelled the rumor that was spreading about hinting that he (John) would never die. This rumor grew out of a misunderstanding of Christ's words to Peter. Jesus had just spoken to Peter, signifying by what death he would glorify God. Peter replied by asking what about John. Jesus said, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" John pointed out that Jesus did not say that he would not die, but merely, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" (John 21:19-23).

John's Care of the Virgin Mary After Pentecost

At the foot of the Cross, Jesus assigned the care of His mother to the Apostle John. This was necessary in 1st Century Jewish culture. The oldest son in the family had the "birthright" and was expected to care for his mother for the rest of her life in the event of his father's death. He was given an extra share of the birthright to do this with. Out of this extra share, he was also expected to provide for any unmarried sisters, including their dowry upon marriage (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Therefore the Virgin Mary lived in John's house along with John's mother, Salome, until her death. This implies that Salome's husband, Zebedee, died shortly after Pentecost.

John was very prominent in the early Church. This was very noticeable to Paul when he came to Jerusalem in c. 48 AD for the Council in Jerusalem regarding the issue of circumcision of the Gentiles (Acts 15). At that time, Paul perceived that James, Peter and John were the pillars of the Jerusalem Church (Galatians 2:9). This James was James the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19), and not John's brother James. John's brother had already been martyred in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-3).

This prominence can also be seen in the accounts of the miracles performed by the Twelve in Jerusalem in the year following Pentecost. As Peter and John went up to the Temple for 9th Hour Prayers, they healed a man who was lame from birth (Acts 3:1-10). As the Twelve taught in the Temple, it was Peter and John who were arrested for preaching the Resurrection of Christ. In defending themselves before Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, and the family of the high priest, everyone marveled at the boldness of the speaking of Peter and John (Acts 4:1-19). Later, after the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), the high priest (and the Sadducees) arrested all of the Twelve Apostles. In their defense, it was Peter and the other Apostles who spoke and not just Peter and John (Acts 5:17-29).

One year to the day after Pentecost, Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:54-60). According to tradition, John and the Virgin Mary watched from a distance, praying for Stephen during his execution. Also from tradition, Deacon Nicanor (Acts 6:5) and 200 others were stoned the same day. These events began a great persecution of the Church at Jerusalem, largely by the hand of the future Apostle Paul (Acts 8:1-3, 22:4-5, 26:10-11, 1 Corinthians 15:9). It was at this time of persecution that most of the Apostles began their various missionary journeys

abroad, and the Twelve Apostles are not mentioned as being together at any time after this. However, John and the Virgin Mary remained in Jerusalem during this persecution.

In about 44 AD, Herod (i.e. Agrippa) began to persecute the Church, killing James, John's brother, with the sword (Acts 12:1). James, like John, had been very eloquent in proclaiming the Resurrection of Christ following his return from Spain. Herod also arrested Peter since he saw it pleased the Jews; but an angel let Peter out of prison at night (Acts 12:3, 7). Peter stopped by at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where everyone was praying for him. There he told them he was okay; but that he was leaving town, and they should be sure to tell James, the Bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17). From there Peter made his way first to Caesarea and eventually to Antioch. Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch c. 46 AD while Peter was still there (Galatians 2:11-15, Acts 11:25-26).

John and the Virgin Mary left Jerusalem also at the time of Herod's persecution. Since John's lot in the evangelization of the world was Asia Minor, they sailed for Ephesus. There they stayed until the death of Herod (Acts 12:20-23). To put this in context, the Apostle Andrew had already been to Ephesus briefly, but the Apostle Paul would not arrive until 52 AD, at the end of his Second Missionary Journey. Since Herod died not too long after he killed James, John and the Virgin Mary most likely stayed in Ephesus less than two years. As was her custom, the Virgin Mary spent her time in prayer, fasting and meditation on the Scriptures.

John and Mary returned to Jerusalem following the death of Herod, and remained there until the early 50's. About that time, Mary heard that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha desired to see her very much. Lazarus had been ordained Bishop of Cyprus by the Apostle Barnabas, but did not dare enter Jerusalem for fear of the Jews. It had been over 20 years since the Jewish leaders had tried to kill him; but they still sought to do so (John 12:9-11).

To solve this dilemma, Mary wrote to Bishop Lazarus asking him to send a ship for her so that she might visit him on Cyprus. This he did and the Apostle John with the Virgin Mary and some others set sail for Cyprus. Out at sea, however, they encountered a violent storm that took them far off course and up to the northern part of the Aegean Sea near Macedonia. There, they put in to the port of Clemes on Athos at the tip of the 50-mile long peninsula. At this location today, there are a number of famous monasteries that trace their origin to the visit of John and the Virgin Mary in the early 50's, and most of the information we have concerning the Virgin Mary's voyage comes from these monasteries.

At that time, the population of Athos consisted of young virgins dedicated to the goddess Diana who were expected to become priestesses to serve in the Greek temples. Also on Athos was a large gold and ivory statue of Jupiter on top of the 6,600-foot peak of Mt. Athos. This statue was mentioned in ancient history accounts of Plutarch and Anaximander as having large gems for eyes; it was used for navigation by seamen. Also present on the peninsula was a huge temple of Apollo where fortune telling, divining and witchcraft took place.

When John and Mary arrived at the port of Clemes, the huge statue of Jupiter fell and shattered to pieces with a thunderous noise. At the same time, the ground shook and idols and pagan statues in the temple and in all the shrines fell prostrate and broke in pieces. During the chaos of this collapse, a voice was heard saying, "Men of Apollo, all of you, go to Clemes Harbor and welcome Mary, the mother of the Great God Jesus". Thus the demons inhabiting the idols were forced against their will to proclaim the truth.

Seeing the destruction around them, all the inhabitants of Athos hurried to Clemes Harbor to meet the Virgin Mary. They received her, the Apostle John and the others with great honor and brought them to a large meeting hall. There they asked her to explain who was the God that she bore and they inquired diligently into the mystery of the Incarnation. They also wondered at how Mary, a Hebrew woman, could explain everything to them in Greek. This was due to the gift of languages that Mary received along with the 120 at Pentecost (Acts 1:14, 2:1-3).

All this resulted in the entire group of the residents of Athos accepting the Christian Faith. They were all then catechized and baptized into the Faith. During their stay on Athos, Mary and the Apostle John performed many miracles among the new converts. Before leaving, they appointed a leader and teacher for the newly illumined residents of Athos from among their traveling party. In addition, Mary prayed for the blessing of Athos, that the Lord would have mercy on it and keep it free from harm until the end of the world along with its inhabitants.

Having blessed Athos, Mary, John and the others set sail for Cyprus. Meanwhile, Lazarus had grown very concerned about Mary's delay, assuming it was because of a storm, and not knowing that all was well. When the ship arrived, there was great rejoicing and thanksgiving. Mary presented Bishop Lazarus with an ornophorion and spimanikia (part of a bishop's vestments) that she had made. And John and Mary shared the good news of all that happened on Athos.

After staying on Cyprus for a short time, Mary blessed the Christians there and returned to Jerusalem with John and the others.

Shortly after Mary and John returned from Cyprus, Mary Magdalene also returned to Jerusalem from her evangelism in Rome and elsewhere. Since she had been very close to the Virgin Mary during Jesus' three-year ministry, she stayed with the Apostle John for several years until the Virgin Mary's death. At this time, the Virgin Mary was in her early 70's and Mary Magdalene was in her late 60's.

The Missionary Journeys of John

After Pentecost, John was at first downcast when he drew the lot of Asia Minor as his mission field due to the danger that lay before him. He repented of this sin of doubt, however, when he remembered the words of the Lord, "There shall not a hair of your head perish" (Luke 21:17-18). After the Virgin Mary died (in the mid-50's AD), John moved to Ephesus permanently. We can see this from Revelation 2 and 3, where John addressed seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These seven churches John knew quite well and he helped to establish them in the 60's and 70's AD, prior to his exile on Patmos. All these Churches are within a 70-mile radius in what is now Western Turkey.

An illustration of John's work in this area can be seen from an account from tradition of events in Hierapolis of Phrygia, a few miles from Laodicea. John worked for a short time there with Nathanael, Philip and Philip's sister Mariamne. There they killed a huge snake-god by their prayers. Following this, John moved on leaving Nathanael, Philip and Mariamne to evangelize the city.

In the late 60's AD, John returned to Jerusalem where Prochorus who had been bishop of Nicomedia joined him. Together, they left for Joppa and stayed three days with Tabitha; then left by ship for Ephesus. They were shipwrecked and all hands were cast ashore at Seleucia except John. Prochorus was arrested under suspicion of sorcery since John didn't come ashore. (They thought John made off with the ship's cargo). Finally, he was released and made his way overland to Mareotis (upon John's prior instruction), walking for 40 days toward Ephesus. Upon Prochorus' arrival, a great wave washed John ashore. After embracing and talking about their experiences, they headed for Ephesus. This was the beginning of a long series of experiences that Jesus had predicted for John, where John would "drink the cup that He drank" (Mark 10:35-39).

In Ephesus they stayed near the house of Dioscorides, the city chief, and went to work for a woman named Romana who ran a bathhouse. John worked at stoking the fire; Prochorus worked at fetching water. After four days, she came by and saw John standing around trying to figure out what to do. She punched him in the face, knocking him to the ground, and called him a lazy, good-for-nothing. [She was a stout woman who used to serve in the army.] John remembered how Jesus was struck, spat upon, lashed, etc. And he told Prochorus that this was an encouragement for them to always bear good will. This happened repeatedly as John began learning the trade. He never gave a word of back talk and Romana thought he was an uneducated peasant. She then had forged legal papers drawn up saying that John and Prochorus were her slaves.

Three months later, Domnus, the 18-year-old son of Dioscorides (who owned the bathhouse) came in and was strangled by a demon that dwelt there. (Prochorus and Domnus' servants watched helplessly.) Romana was in profound grief over how to explain this to her boss. She prayed to Artemis (or Diana) and pulled out her hair and tore her clothes.

John paused in his work to come ask what happened. Before Prochorus could explain, Romana grabbed John, accused him of being a warlock, punched him in the face and demanded he raise Domnus from the dead. John stayed calm, withdrew to pray, then raised Domnus and brought him to Romana. Romana was so ashamed of how she had treated John she couldn't

even look him in the face but cried bitterly at his feet. John then explained whom he was and forgave her and she believed.

Meanwhile, Dioscorides had died of a heart attack on learning that his only son was dead. John, Prochorus, Romana and a crowd of others went there and John raised him also. Dioscorides, Domnus and Romana were then baptized.

Later at a festival of Artemis (Diana), John stood on the high place near the statue of Artemis in his sooty work clothes. This angered the crowd and they hurled a number of stones at John; all these missed John and hit the statue. The “son of thunder” then spoke to them of their delusion and challenged them to have their broken statue punish him. They threw more stones, which only turned back and hit the ones throwing them.

John prayed that the Lord would show these people who’s Lord. An earthquake and sudden heat wave struck and 200 people died; the rest begged John for mercy. John prayed again, raised up the 200 and they all believed, were catechized and baptized.

Following this, John performed many other signs similar to those he and Peter did back in Jerusalem in the early 30’s AD. The demon that dwelt in the temple of Artemis, however, began to fear that John would cast him out and destroy the temple. So the demon assumed the appearance of a magistrate and persuaded some citizens that he was escorting two sorcerers, John and Prochorus, to prison when they escaped. He offered a large bounty for their capture, dead or alive.

At first, Romana and Dioscorides rescued John and Prochorus. But then the demon aroused a whole mob against them while they were in Dioscorides’ house. John voluntarily surrendered to the mob and they took him to the temple of Artemis. By his prayers, the “son of thunder” caused the statue of Artemis to topple and the temple to collapse. John then forced the demon to confess to his plot and directed him to leave the area. “Numberless crowds came to believe and disdained the worship of idols.”

However, certain Jews brought news of this to Emperor Domitian in about 81 AD. Domitian began a great prosecution of Christians and had John arrested. After many beatings, John was forced to drink a cup of strong poison, then was boiled in oil. Neither had any effect. Domitian thought John was immortal and had him exiled to the island of Patmos, a penal colony.

On the way to Patmos, one of the sailors fell overboard, drowned and was lost at sea. Everyone on board was grief-stricken except John. John asked each sailor in turn which deity they worshipped. After inquiring of everyone on the ship, John exclaimed how many gods, yet none could save one drowned man. John prayed and a large wave broke over the ship depositing the drowned man alive on the deck.

Later on in the voyage, a storm arose and the ship was in danger of breaking up. The crew asked John to pray again, which he did and calmed the sea. Still later, when they ran out of water, John turned seawater into fresh water. Near the end of the voyage, John healed one of the sailors of dysentery. At this, the entire crew wanted to become John’s disciples and go wherever he wanted. John replied that this was not proper; they still needed to take him to

Patmos lest the emperor punish them. When they arrived on Patmos, John catechized and baptized the entire crew.

John first stayed in the home of Myron the governor's father-in-law. After John cast a demon out of Myron's eldest son, the entire family believed. The governor, Lawrence, sent his wife and son to be baptized also. The wife wished to remain celibate in her father's house, but John would not agree to this. John sent her back to her husband saying that he too would come to believe soon. This happened two years later when his term of office expired.

Many of people in the city came to Myron's home to be catechized, healed and baptized by John. Those who were rich wanted to offer John large amounts of money. John instructed them to give it to the poor with their own hand in order that they might have treasure in heaven.

Three years after arriving on Patmos, John and Prochorus were in the market place near the temple of Apollo. Some of the priests of Apollo began to sneer at John and ridicule what he taught. The "son of thunder" prayed, and the temple of Apollo collapsed. The priests immediately grabbed John and inflicted many stripes on him; then they had him thrown into the deepest dungeon. When Myron and his family heard, they got John out -- since they were very influential.

A magician named Coenops, a master of illusion, lived in the wilderness of Patmos. The priests of Apollo went to him to get him to take revenge on John and kill him. This began a battle between the "son of thunder" and the son of perdition. First Coenops sent demons three times to kill John; but John sent them to torment in the abyss. Finally Coenops was so mad he came to the city to challenge John face to face with his illusions.

Several times, Coenops appeared to raise the dead relatives of grieving bystanders by having demons take the form of the loved ones. Coenops challenged John to do the same, but John calmly and humbly said that the Lord did not send him to do that but to teach deluded people. Then John said that Coenops' signs would soon come to nothing. Hearing this, the people jumped on John and beat him until they thought he was dead.

The next day, Coenops returned with his demons in the form of the "resurrected" loved ones and announced to John how he planned to disgrace and shame John further. At the shore of the Aegean, Coenops clapped his hands together and plunged into the sea out of sight, saying he would return in glory. Then the "son of thunder" prayed that the same fate might befall Coenops as befell Pharaoh. At this, there was a peal of thunder and a "boiling" or stirring of the waters where Coenops went under; then nothing. The people waited for three days for Coenops to return -- all to no avail. As for the demons that served Coenops, John ordered them to depart from the island.

Sometime later, a Jew named Philo met John in the market place and debated John on the Scriptures for two days. As John was debating, a young man brought a sick man for John to heal, which John did. Philo replied, "Teacher, what is love?" John responded, "God is love and he who has love has God." Philo replied, "Therefore show the love of God and come home with me." John did so and healed Philo's wife of leprosy while he stayed there. Philo and his wife believed and were baptized.

After John left Philo's house, he came across two of the priests of Apollo who had urged Coenops against John. One priest asked John to heal his lame son that he too may believe. John said, "First believe, then God will heal your son." The priest replied, "First heal my son, then I'll believe." The "son of thunder" raised his voice, "Do not tempt God that your lack of faith become blasphemy. In the Name of Jesus Christ, you shall have your son's crippled feet." Then, John sent the other priest with Prochorus to the first priest's house to bring back the son. When Prochorus got there the child was healed. When the crippled priest saw his son, he cried out with tears in a loud voice, "Have mercy on me, disciple of the Compassionate God." John then healed him and baptized his entire household.

All this happened in the city of Flora on Patmos. After three years, John and Prochorus went to Myrimousa where they observed a young man in chains about to be sacrificed to a wolf-god, that was actually a demon. John commanded the demon to depart; bystanders were very amazed and listened intently as John taught them.

The priests of Zeus, who worshipped the wolf-god, were angry with John. One day, one of the priests' sons was strangled in a bathhouse by the same demon that John had cast out of Romana's bathhouse six years earlier. The priest confessed to John that he, too, had come to believe and asked if John would raise his son. John did so, then cast out the demon and baptized the priest, his son and many others.

After this John and Prochorus left for the suburb of Phlogeon where John cast a demon out of a widow's only son, then catechized and baptized them. On the fourth day they were there, John stood near the temple of Dionysus (Bacchus) as the pagans were starting an orgy. To keep John from hindering the festival, the priests bound John, took him away and beat him until he was half-dead. John prayed that He would do to this temple as He did to the Philistines' temple by Samson. The temple then collapsed, crushing the twelve priests inside who were preparing the orgy.

A renowned sorcerer, Noetian, was furious at John for leveling the temple of Dionysus. He conjured up twelve demons to pose as the resurrected twelve priests, pretending that he had raised them. Knowing Noetian's intent, John sent Prochorus around the other side of the collapsed temple before Noetian could introduce the demons and had Prochorus send the demons to a waterless place. When Noetian tried to "raise" the 12 priests, nothing happened and he was embarrassed. The townsfolk would have killed him if John hadn't prevented them.

The next day, as John was baptizing 220 people, Noetian turned the water John was using as a baptismal font into blood. John turned it back and also struck Noetian with blindness. At this, Noetian begged John's mercy, repented, and was baptized also along with his household.

After this, John and Prochorus went to the city of Karo, three miles distant. One young man in the crowd, Sosipater, who was listening to John, wanted to follow Christ, but was being hounded by his mother into incest with her. He invited John to his house to help him resist his mother. The mother, in turn, denounced John and her son to the governor and the governor ordered John and Sosipater sown into leather bags full of poisonous snakes. Before they could do so, John caused the right hands of the governor and the mother to wither.

The judge, who was secretly a Christian, then confessed his faith and begged John's forgiveness. John restored the judge's and the mother's hands and the judge invited John, Prochorus and Sosipater to his house for two days. During this time, the judge and his family were catechized and baptized. Meanwhile, the mother had come to profound repentance. When John and Sosipater came to her house, they found her weeping bitterly. John comforted her, then catechized and baptized her and her son. She lived the rest of her life in fasting and prayer and in distributing her wealth to the poor.

Toward the end of John's exile on Patmos, he wrote the book of Revelation by dictating it to Prochorus who then copied it onto good parchment.

In about 96 AD, Emperor Domitian was assassinated and his successor, Nerva, did not persecute the Christians. John was free to return to Ephesus. By then, nearly all the inhabitants of Patmos had come to believe, and they wanted John to stay. When he told them that the Lord had instructed him to return to Ephesus, they asked him to draft a written document that they could use to remain steadfast in the faith. This John did later by dictating his Gospel to Prochorus who had Sosipater copy it onto good parchment. After bidding farewell (with many tears) to the residents of Patmos where John had spent 15 years, John and Prochorus sailed to Ephesus where they were received with great joy and stayed in the house of Domnus [Dioscorides had died during John's absence.]

John spent the rest of his life in Ephesus in strict fasting and prayer, living as a Nazarite. Because of his age, he didn't have the strength to preach anymore but taught just the bishops privately. Jerome stated that the faithful carried him to Church where he would say over and over "Little children, love one another." When his disciples asked him why he just said this, he replied, "This is the Lord's commandment; and if you keep it, it is enough."

John died in the third year of Trajan (about 101 AD) at the age of nearly 100. Most accounts state that John instructed seven of his disciples to go outside the city with him and dig his grave. John then climbed in and died as he lay in the grave. The seven then buried him. Later the faithful dug up the grave to give John a more prominent resting-place, but the grave was empty.

The Beloved Apostle

September 26, 2017

Gospel: John 19:25-27, 21:24-25

John As The Beloved Apostle

The Gospel reading for Matins expands on the above Reading to include John 21:15-25. Today's Gospel Reading begins at the foot of the Cross, where the Virgin Mary, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and John were gathered. Clopas (or Cleopas) was the brother of Joseph, the betrothed of the Virgin Mary, and his wife was the Virgin Mary's sister-in-law. All of the Twelve Apostles, besides John, had scattered and were in hiding (John 20:19) as was predicted by the Scriptures (Matthew 26:31, Zechariah 13:7). Judas Iscariot had already hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-10).

As Jesus was dying on the Cross, He committed the care of His mother to the Apostle John. This was a tremendous honor for John and this indicates John's closeness to the Lord and how he was "beloved". Under the provisions of the Mosaic Law, the oldest son in the family had the "birthright" and was expected to care for his mother for the rest of her life in the event of his father's death. However, the Virgin Mary had no other natural children, and it was her only Son that was dying. John was very close to the Virgin Mary and John was also the only one with the courage to be present and identified with Jesus at the Cross. As we'll see from the Epistle lesson, John also had a considerable measure of the love of God.

John Chrysostom commented, "John concealed himself in modesty as he wrote his Gospel. Had John desired to boast, he would have also put in the cause for which Jesus loved him, since probably it was some great and wonderful one. But why did Jesus converse on nothing else with John, not even comforting him? Because it was no time for comforting by words; besides, it was no little thing for him to be honored with such honor and to receive the reward of steadfastness. For since it was likely that, being His mother, she would grieve and require protection, He with reason entrusted her to the beloved disciple. This He did, knitting them together in love. John understood this and took her to his own home" (Homily Lxxxv on John 19).

A similar circumstance occurred at the Last Supper. At one point during the Last Supper, Jesus was troubled in Spirit and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" (John 13:21). The disciples were perplexed about whom He spoke, and looked at one another. John, however, was leaning on Jesus' bosom. Peter motioned for John to ask Jesus who it was of whom He spoke. John then leaned back on Jesus' breast and asked, "Lord, who is it?" (John 13:22-25).

John Chrysostom stated, "It is a question worth asking why, when all were distressed and trembling, when their Leader was troubled, John like one at ease leans on Jesus' bosom, and not only leans, but even lies on His breast? Nor is this the only thing worthy of enquiry, but also that which follows. John referred to himself in his Gospel as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. Why did no one else say this of himself? The others were loved too, but John was loved more

than any of them. John would not have mentioned it either unless he had come to this passage in his Gospel history. For if after telling us that Peter beckoned to John to ask, he had added nothing more, he would have caused considerable doubt and would have compelled us to inquire into the reason. In order to solve this difficulty, he said that he lay on the bosom of Jesus. Do you think that you have learned a little thing when you have heard that 'he lay', and that their Master allowed such boldness to them? If you desire to know the cause of this, the action was of love. This does not imply that John was greater than Peter; the thing took place because of the great love that Jesus bore toward John. Observe too John's modesty; he didn't mention his own name, but only 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (Ibid.).

Peter's Love for John

The Gospel lesson contains another interchange between John, Peter and Jesus. This time, the Lord had just indicated to Peter by what death he would glorify God. Peter then turned around and, pointing to John asked, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus replied, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:18-22). This time Peter asked the question while John was silent.

John Chrysostom wrote that this indicated Peter's love for John as well as the Lord's love for John. "When therefore Christ had foretold great things to Peter, committed the world to him, spoke beforehand of his martyrdom, and testified that his love was greater than that of the others, desiring to have John also share with him, he said, 'But Lord, what about this man?' In other words, shall he (i.e. John) not come the same way with us? As at that other time not being able himself to ask, he put John forward; so here desiring to make John a return and supposing that he would desire to ask about the matters pertaining to himself, but had not courage, he himself undertook the questioning. Jesus spoke from strong affection, but also by His words taught us not to be impatient, or curious beyond what seems good to Him. For because Peter was ever hot and springing forward to inquiries such as this, to cut short his warmth and to teach him not to inquire farther, He said this (Ibid.).

Just prior to this, the Lord had asked Peter three times whether he loved Him. Each time that Peter responded in the affirmative, the Lord replied, "Feed My lambs", "Tend My sheep", and Feed My sheep". Chrysostom summarized this by saying, "There are indeed many other things which are able to give us boldness towards God and to show us bright and approved. But that which most of all brings good will from on high is tender care for our neighbor" (Homily Lxxxviii on John 21). The Lord had summarized this in a similar fashion earlier with the Greatest Commandment, which was part of a Creed used in the 1st Century synagogue worship. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40). For more details of the Lord's teaching on the Greatest Commandment, see the Gospel lesson for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost.

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One might ask why the Lord singled Peter out to ask him this and not John or one of the others. Chrysostom stated that Peter was the "mouth of the disciples, the leader of the band"; that is, as the first among equals. Paraphrasing the situation, Chrysostom wrote, "If you love Me, preside over your brethren. And the warm love which you always showed and in which you rejoiced, show now. And the life which you said you would lay down for Me, now give for My sheep" (Ibid.).

Peter was grieved that the Lord asked him this question a third time (John 21:17). He remembered how he denied he even knew Jesus three times in the courtyard of the high priest (John 18:13-27). He knew that he was forgiven, and it was painful for him to even remember his sin. But the Lord had a larger purpose here. Earlier Peter had overstated his love, saying that he would never stumble because of his Lord. He even proclaimed that he would die with his Lord before he ever denied Him (Matthew 26:33-35). Chrysostom stated, “For on this account Peter was troubled, ‘lest perchance I think I love and don’t, as before when I thought and affirmed much, yet I was convicted at last’. But Jesus asked him the third time to show at what price He sets the care of His own sheep, and that this especially is a sign of love towards Him. The Lord did not say this to Peter as distrusting him, but as greatly trusting him. The Lord wished besides to point out a proof of love towards Him and to instruct us in what manner especially we ought to love Him” (Ibid.).

Peter and John continued to be very close after this for the next two decades. After Pentecost, we see them together going up to the Temple for 9th Hour Prayer, and healing the man who was born lame (Acts 3:1-10). Peter and John together were bold in testifying before the family of the high priest and the Sadducees (Acts 4:5-13, 5:17). After the Apostles were arrested, the boldness of Peter and John encouraged the other Apostles to be bold also (Acts 5:29). When the Samaritans received the Word of God from Deacon Philip, the Apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5-17).

However, Peter began travelling more frequently, even taking his wife with him (1 Corinthians 9:5). Since John had been assigned to the care of the Virgin Mary, he remained behind in Jerusalem more frequently, such as when Peter “went through all parts of the country and came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda” (Acts 9:32). When Herod (Agrippa) killed James, the brother of John, with the sword in 44 AD and tried to kill Peter also, Peter escaped (Acts 12:1-17) and slowly made his way to Antioch and out of Herod’s jurisdiction (Galatians 2:11). Peter and John were together again briefly for the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD (Acts 15:1-29). After that, Peter began his four major missionary journeys to Asia Minor, Europe, Africa and Britain (For details, see Appendix A.) and he saw John infrequently during the rest of his life. One time of reunion for all the Apostles was the occasion of the funeral for the Virgin Mary in about 55 AD.

Perfecting the Love of God in Us

September 26, 2017

Epistle: 1 John 4:12-19

Being greatly loved by the Lord, John had a perspective on love that was uncommon in its depth among the people of God. There are several aspects to this that are brought out in the Epistle lesson:

The Source of Love

God is love (1 John 3:8, 4:8, 4:16), meaning that He is the source and embodiment of all love. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). He did this by sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10), where the plan for the coming of His Son was first announced in the Garden of Eden after the Fall (Genesis 3:15). “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His Only Begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9). Christ is “the Son of the Father in truth and in love” (2 John 1:3). To be godly, one needs to continue in or abide in the love of God. “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16). To say that God is love is not to define who God is, but rather it is a description of His relationship to us as our Father. He shows fatherly care to believer and unbeliever alike (Matthew 5:45), but unbelievers don’t acknowledge Him as Father.

There is a theological aspect to the love of God. “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:23-24). John was fighting a Gnostic heresy most of his life. Two main issues were: 1) Does God the Father have a Son who is of the same substance as His Father (i.e. consubstantial)? 2) Is the man Jesus that person, God the Son? John was teaching that Jesus Christ is one Divine Person having two natures (i.e. God and man). To deny this denies the love of God in the Incarnation in sending His Son.

The Greatest Commandment

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot (i.e. the Father) also loves him (i.e. us) who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). Since Christ is the Head of the Body (Colossians 1:18), one cannot love the Head without loving the Body. This is what the Greatest Commandment states also. “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s were righteous” (1 John 3:11-12). When Christ was asked which was the Greatest Commandment, He quoted from the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). Yet this Commandment didn’t originate with Moses’ revelation on Mt. Sinai. Adam and Eve knew this in the Garden of Eden from the beginning and Cain was judged for failing to live up to it.

John reminded people of this ancient Commandment. “And this is His Commandment: that we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us Commandment” (1 John 3:23). “And this Commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 John 4:21). “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His Commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His Commandments. And His Commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:2-3). This is not a legalistic code of do this and don’t do that. For the Law of God has been written on His people’s hearts (Hebrews 8:10-13, Jeremiah 31:33). Even unbelievers have at least a portion of God’s Law written on their hearts, where their conscience also bears witness (Romans 2:15).

John continued this theme in his second Epistle directed to “the elect lady and her children” (2 John 1:1). Most people interpret “the elect lady” as one of the Churches that looked to John for guidance. “And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love that we walk according to His Commandments. This is the Commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it” (2 John 1:5-6).

Love for one’s brother in keeping with the Greatest Commandment meant a lot in the 1st Century. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). After all, Christ instructed us to love others as He had loved us. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). This “new commandment” is “new” in the sense that the quality of our love is measured against that of Christ Himself, and is to be a sacrificial love as His was. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3). The way this works out was described by the Lord as feeding, welcoming, visiting, and clothing the least of these My brethren. To refuse to do so to the least of the members of the Body of Christ is to refuse to do so to the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:37-40). John stated it like this: “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

False Love, the Love of this World

In contrast to love of God and love of neighbor, John stated, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8). “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20). “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). The Venerable Bede put it this way: “Even though he may think he is enlightened by the Lord, anyone who comes to the font of life hating his brother is still in darkness. It is there that he is to be reborn; it is the cup of that precious blood whereby he is to be redeemed. He cannot in any way have put off the darkness of his sins when he did not take care to put on the fundamentals of love.”

John’s uncle was James, the Lord’s brother and Bishop of Jerusalem from 30 to 62 AD. Living in Jerusalem until c. 55 AD, John was very much influenced by his uncle. If we take the word “love” in John’s writings and substitute the word “faith”, John sounds very much like his uncle. “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. For as the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead” (James 2:24, 26).

The love of God creates a stark contrast between those who love God and those who don't. "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:10). "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1). "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

In John's 3rd Epistle, he wrote to "the beloved Gaius" who embodied the love of God both toward the brethren and toward strangers.

Perfecting the Love of God in Us

The love of God as seen in His Church is not a static situation, but is always changing. We can either grow toward being perfected in Christ or we can grow cold. An example of growing cold can be seen from John's vision while he was in exile on Patmos (Revelation 1:9). He wrote to the Church in Ephesus that they had left their first love (Revelation 2:4). In other words, they had grown cold in their love toward God and their brethren. In contrast to this, John wrote in his Epistle that we can and should be perfected in love. This begins with faith: "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us" (1 John 4:16).

For love to be perfected, we need a continuing vision of Christ. "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us" (1 John 4:12). Love for one another is the result or the evidence of the continuing vision of Christ. Keeping His Commandments is one of the prerequisites for achieving that result. "Whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (1 John 2:5). Keeping His Commandments does not imply only a mere lip service to the Ten Commandments, although the Ten Commandments are a good place to start in our culture. Keeping His Commandments rather implies living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3). Our bodies are a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and we have the Law written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 3:3). Therefore we do not need to make great efforts to go somewhere or do something to find out what God would have us do at any moment (Deuteronomy 30:11-15).

Keeping His Commandments is part of a process of striving for righteousness. It is like faith versus works (James 2:24-26). Without both, one has neither. Without striving for righteousness, one does not have the love of God, and vice versa. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:6-9). We all sin (Romans 3:23); therefore we all need to confess our sins as part of our striving for righteousness. A study of the lives of the saints is helpful for us in that we see examples of people who struggled in their striving for righteousness, and who exhibited the love of God as a result.

In our striving for righteousness, it is also helpful to see where the battlefield is. It is our own desires that we need to fight. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it

gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13-15). For it is the things that come from our own hearts that really defile us (Matthew 15:18-20). Thus the striving forces us to concentrate on the plank in our own eyes, rather than looking for specks in the eyes of others (Matthew 7:3). A good treatise on this striving was written by John Cassian (4th Century). He wrote his treatise for the benefit of the monks of his day, but his insight is very apropos for our day also. For details, see John Cassian, “On the Eight Vices”, The Philokalia, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1983.

Fear is not part of this love because fear does not involve faith. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment. Because as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). We have been delivered to serve Him without fear (Luke 1:74), for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). To return to fear again would be to receive the spirit of bondage (Romans 8:15, Hebrews 2:15).

During our striving for righteousness, however, we do have the fear of God. “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). Mired in our sins, we fear coming short of entering His rest (Hebrews 4:1). Thus we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), and we submit to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21). Sometimes it is necessary for sinners to be rebuked publicly in order that the rest may fear and not be carried away with the sins of a few (1 Timothy 5:20). Fear is part of the struggle, but fear is done away with when love is perfected. Even Christ was described as having a godly fear in learning obedience by the things which He suffered. Even Christ was described as having been perfected (Hebrews 5:7-9); i.e. perfected in His flesh, for He was always perfect in His Deity.

We are encouraged to have a simple, childlike faith where we are not concerned about worldly matters such as food, clothing and shelter (Matthew 6:25-34). This way, we will be free to concentrate on love. If our love were perfected, we would not fear those who may kill the body, because we know that they cannot kill the soul (Matthew 10:28). This is a striving that takes some effort, but it is not impossible. For the Lord said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). In this way we are to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1).

The wisdom of God in this is also a mystery. Paul wrote about “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:26-27). Because of the continuing vision of Christ that Paul had, he labored, “striving according to His working which worked in him mightily”. His goal was to teach “every man in all wisdom, that he may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28-29), that they “may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Colossians 4:12).

John’s Epistles may seem at first glance like they were written by a simpleton and not by a theologian. But the converse is the case. All of John’s writings have profound insight into the love of God that was bestowed on him in an uncommon way.

Diadochos of Photiki (5th Century) commented on this: “Obedience is the chief among the initiatory virtues; for first it displaces presumption and then it engenders humility within us. Thus it becomes for those who are willing to embrace it, a door leading to the love of God” (On Spiritual Knowledge, Text 41).

Martyrs Barbara, Catherine, Paraskeva and Kyriake

The Martyrs Barbara, Catherine, Paraskeva and Kyriake
July 7, October 28, December 4, November 25, 2016

Gospel: Mark 5:24-34, Matthew 4:25-5:12

Epistle: Galatians 3:23-29, 4:1-5

Today's Gospel and the first half of today's Epistle lesson are used in the West in late June. The second half of the Epistle lesson is not used in the West.

Saint	Date	Gospel	Epistle
Barbara	December 4	Mark 5:24-34	Galatians 3:23-4:5
Catherine	November 25	Mark 5:24-34	Galatians 3:23-4:5
Paraskeva of Iconium	October 28	--	Galatians 3:23-4:5
Kyriake	July 7	Matthew 4:25-5:12	Galatians 3:23-4:5

Epistle: Galatians 3:23-29, 4:1-5

The Law as a Pedagogue¹

Paul stated, "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the Law, kept for the faith, which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the Law was our pedagogue² until Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a pedagogue" (Galatians 3:23-25). This applied to the life of the Martyr Barbara in a special way. Barbara was kept in a tower away from people by her father, but learned about Christ anyway by looking out at the beauty of nature. The idolatry of her father kept Barbara under guard, but faith was revealed to her in spite of the "Law" of her father. After faith came to Barbara, she no longer needed to be under the pedagogue of her father, and he tried to kill her out of anger against her faith. For more details of the life of Barbara, see Appendix A. As we understand how the Epistle lesson applies to us, we can also get some insight into the mercy and grace of God toward the Martyrs Barbara and Catherine.

The Mosaic Law has a similar effect on us in training us toward righteousness. Clement of Alexandria taught³ that the Law is not theoretical but practical. Like a pedagogue, its goal is primarily to train one to a virtuous, not an intellectual life. In this fashion, there is a great difference between health and knowledge, where it is difficult for one to learn unless he is healthy. The Law aims to get us healthy, by healing the passions, so that we can learn from the Word.

"When the heavenly guide, the Word, was inviting men to salvation, He exhorted us to yearn after true life now and to come. But now, following in His own steps, He makes what had been prescribed the subject of persuasion,

¹ For a more detailed study of other aspects of the Mosaic Law as applied to our life today, see the Study for Holy Week: Holy Tuesday Matins and Holy Thursday Evening

² A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

³ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor or Pedagogue, I, 1.

promising the cure of the passions within us. Let us then designate this Word appropriately by the one name *Tutor*” (or *Pedagogue*, or *Instructor*).

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“The Instructor being practical, not theoretical, His aim is thus to improve the soul, not to teach, and to train it up to a virtuous, not to an intellectual life. This same Word is a good teacher, but not yet in the present instance. For the Word teaches us in matters of doctrine by explaining and revealing. But our Educator, being practical, first exhorts to the attainment of right dispositions and character. Then He persuades us to the energetic practice of our duties, enjoining on us pure commandments, and exhorting us to follow representations of those who formerly wandered in error. Both are very useful; that which assumes the form of counseling leads to obedience, and that which is presented in the form of example leads to imitation. The latter is of two kinds — the one having for its purpose that we should choose and imitate the good, and the other that we should reject and turn away from the opposite”.

“From this ensues the healing of our passions due to the quieting of those examples. The Pedagogue strengthens our souls, and by His benign commands, as by gentle medicines, guides the sick to the perfect knowledge of the truth”.

“There is a wide difference between health and knowledge. Learning produces knowledge; healing produces health. One, who is ill, will not therefore learn any branch of instruction till he is well. Neither to learners nor to the sick is each injunction expressed the same way. To learners, it is expressed in such a way as to lead to knowledge, and to the sick in such a way as to lead to health. For those of us who are diseased in body, a physician is required, so also those who are diseased in soul require a pedagogue to cure our maladies. Following this a teacher is needed to train and guide the soul to all required knowledge when it is made able to admit the revelation of the Word. Eagerly desiring to perfect us by a gradual process that is conducive to salvation, and that is suited for effective discipline, a beautiful arrangement is observed by the all-beneficial Word, who first exhorts, then trains, and finally teaches”.

The Martyrs Barbara and Catherine were thus prepared by their training in morality and discipline to receive Christ!

We ask for the same assistance from the Lord all our lives. For example, in both “The Evening Prayer” at Vespers and in “The Great Doxology” at Matins, we say:

1. Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.
2. Blessed are You, O Sovereign; let me understand Your statutes.
3. Blessed are You, O Holy One; enlighten me with Your statutes.

There is a progression here in our understanding of the things of God as we are first taught, then we understand, and finally the Holy Spirit enlightens us.

The Evlogetaria, that is sung during Sunday Matins, illustrates the interaction of the Law with the Holy Spirit. As the cantor describes the work of the Holy Spirit during the Resurrection, the congregation responds by asking the Lord to teach us His Statutes. If we understand the Lord’s statutes, and are enlightened by them, we will also understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst! The Evlogetaria goes as follows:

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: The Company of the Angels was amazed, when they beheld You numbered among the dead. Yet You, O Savior, destroyed the power of death, and with You raising up Adam and releasing all men from Hell.

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: Why, O women disciples, do you mingle sweet-smelling spices with your tears of pity? The radiant angel within the sepulcher cried to the Myrrh-Bearing women. ‘Behold the grave and understand; for the Savior is risen from the tomb’.

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: Very early in the morning the Myrrh-Bearing women ran lamenting to Your tomb. But an angel came toward them saying: ‘The time for lamentation is passed; do not weep; but announce to the Apostles the Resurrection’.

Refrain: Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes.

Cantor: The Myrrh-Bearing women mourned; as bearing ointments they drew near Your tomb, O Savior. But the angel spoke to them, saying, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? In that He is God, He is risen from the dead’.

We may not consider that a good understanding of the Resurrection is the Lord teaching us His Statutes. We may think of His Statutes as being rote “do’s” and “don’ts”, but there is more depth to His Statutes than that.

John Cassian stated⁴ that the Law was implanted in man at the Creation; if man had kept it, there would have been no need for the Law of Moses. Examples of the working of this primitive Law are Abel, Enoch and Noah. Because the original Law was utterly corrupted by freedom and the opportunity to sin, the severe restrictions of the Law of Moses were added as its helper.

“At man’s creation, God implanted in him naturally complete knowledge of the Law. If man had kept this, as at the beginning, according to the Lord’s purposes, there would not have been any need for another Law to be given, which He afterwards proclaimed in writing. It would be superfluous for an external remedy to be offered, where an internal one was still implanted and vigorous. But since this had been utterly corrupted by freedom and the opportunity of sinning, the severe restrictions of the Law of Moses were added as the executor and vindicator of this earlier Law and to use the expressions of Scripture, as its helper. Through fear of immediate punishment, men might be kept from completely losing the good of natural knowledge, according to the word of the prophet who says, ‘He gave the Law to help them’ (Isaiah 8:20 LXX). It is also described by the Apostle as having been given as a schoolmaster or pedagogue (Galatians 3:24) to little children, as it instructs and guards them to prevent them from departing, through sheer forgetfulness, from the teaching in which they had been instructed by the light of nature”.

“That the complete knowledge of the Law was implanted in man at his first creation is clearly proved from this. Before the Law, and even before the flood, all holy men observed the commands of the Law without having the letter to read. How could Abel, without the command of the Law, have known that he

⁴ John Cassian, Second Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 23.

ought to offer to God a sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof (Genesis 4:4), unless he had been taught by the Law which was naturally implanted in him? How could Noah have distinguished what animals were clean and what were unclean (Genesis 7:2), when the commandment of the Law had not yet made a distinction, unless he had been taught by a natural knowledge? How did Enoch learn how to ‘walk with God’ (Genesis 5:22), having never acquired any light of the Law?”

Clement of Alexandria stated⁵ that the Law, besides creating good government, attracted those who were interested in knowing God. The Law is spiritual, coming from the Holy Spirit; understanding the Law is true wisdom, since it leads us to Christ.

“We may call the Law with accuracy the divine ordinance, inasmuch as it was given by God through Moses. It accordingly conducts to the divine. Paul said, ‘The Law was instituted because of transgressions, till the Seed should come, to whom the promise was made’ (Galatians 3:19). Then, as if in explanation of his meaning, he added, ‘But before faith came, we were kept under the Law, shut up’, clearly through fear, in consequence of sins, ‘unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the Law was a schoolmaster or pedagogue until Christ, that we should be justified by faith’ (Galatians 3:23-24). The true legislator is he who assigns to each department of the soul what is suitable to it and to its operations. Moses was a living Law, governed by the benign Word. Accordingly, he furnished a good government, which is the right discipline of men in social life. He also handled the administration of justice, which is that branch of knowledge, which deals with the correction of transgressors in the interests of justice, where punishment is the correction of the soul. The whole system of Moses trains us to become good and noble men, and seeks out men like us. And that wisdom, which is capable of treating those rightly, who have been caught by the Word, is legislative wisdom. Possessing and using this wisdom is most kingly”.

“It is the wise man alone whom the philosophers proclaim king, legislator, general, just, holy, God-beloved. We discover these qualities in Moses, as shown from the Scriptures themselves, so that we may pronounce Moses to be truly wise. It is the shepherd’s art to care for the sheep; for ‘the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep’ (John 10:11). So also legislation, as it presides over and cares for the flock of men, establishes the virtue of men, by fanning into flame, what good there is⁶ in humanity”.

“He Himself is the good Shepherd and Lawgiver of the one flock, ‘of the sheep who hear Him’ (John 10:3, 16, 27). He is the one who cares for them, ‘seeking’, and finding by the Law and the word, ‘that which was lost’ (Luke 15:4-7), since the Law is spiritual and leads to contentment. For that which has arisen through the Holy Spirit is spiritual. And he is truly a legislator, who not only

⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 26.

⁶ As Clement wrote, Christianity was illegal and banned by the Roman Empire. Today, however, the system of justice of most civilized nations is based on the Mosaic Law. By saying what he does, Clement has anticipated the effect of the Mosaic Law on the civilized world today, 18 centuries after his time.

announces what is good and noble, but also understands it. The Law of this man who possesses knowledge is the saving precept; or rather, the Law is the precept of knowledge. For the Word is 'the power and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24). The expounder of the laws is Christ, who gave the Law on Mt. Sinai; He is the first expounder of the divine commands, who unveiled the bosom of the Father, the only-begotten Son".

"Those who obey the Law, since they have some knowledge of Him, cannot be ignorant of the truth. But those who disbelieve, and have shown a repugnance to engage in the works of the Law certainly confess their ignorance of the truth".

The Jewish leaders of Christ's day had a problem with the Law. Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁷ that they "did not know, neither did they understand, therefore they walked in the daytime as in darkness, feeling for, but not touching, the truth we possess, which was contained in the Law. They conformed to the letter, but did not submit to the spirit".

Irenaeus stated⁸ that they should not say that their unbelief came from the Law. For the Law never hindered them from believing in the Son of God, but it even exhorted them so to do, saying that men can be saved in no other way from the old wound of the serpent.

Clement of Alexandria stated⁹ that the Law was given to them, and terror ensued for the prevention of transgressions and for the promotion of right actions, getting their attention, and so winning them to obedience to the true Instructor. He was one and the same Word, who reduced them to conformity with the urgent demands of the Law. For Paul says that the Law was given to be a 'schoolmaster until Christ' (Galatians 3:24). So that from this it is clear, that one alone, true, good, just, in the image and likeness of the Father, His Son Jesus, the Word of God, is our Instructor. God has entrusted us to Him, as an affectionate father commits his children to a worthy pedagogue, expressly charging us, 'This is my beloved Son; hear Him' (Matthew 17:5).

Adoption as Sons

This process of entrusting us to Christ is called "adoption". Paul stated, "Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:1-5). The martyrs of the Church over the ages have illustrated this by their lives in being obedient even to a horrible death. By their free choice, they accepted their lot, and they were shown to be men and women of God, and not children, even though they may not have had much instruction in the Faith, like the Martyr Barbara.

⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, I, xix, 2.

⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, ii, 7.

⁹ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor or Pedagogue, I, 11.

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁰ that those under grace are equal and spiritual, and have free choice. By adopting us as sons, He has conferred manhood on us, which requires responsibility on our part.

“Do you not hear that we are no longer under that Law, which was accompanied with fear, but under the Word, the master of free choice? There are not, then, in the same Word some illuminated and some natural men; but all who have abandoned the desires of the flesh are equal and spiritual before the Lord”.

“In the adoption of sons, He has admitted that those, who are under fear and sins, are children; but has conferred manhood on those who are under faith, by calling them sons, in contradistinction from the children that are under the Law. ‘For you are no more a servant’, he says, ‘but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God’” (Galatians 4:7).

Clement continued¹¹ that when we were babies, even though heirs, we were kept under guard by the elements of the world. Even philosophers are like this unless Christ makes them adults; without Christ, they are unable to consume solid food and can only consume milk like a baby.

“Some worship the elements, the air by Diogenes, the water by Thales, the fire by Hippasus; those who suppose that atoms are the first principles of things arrogantly claim the name of philosophers, but are wretched creatures devoted to pleasure. ‘This I pray’, Paul says, ‘that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all discernment, that ye may approve things that are excellent’ (Philippians 1:9-10). ‘When we were children’, he says, ‘we were kept in bondage under the elements of the world. And the child, though heir, does not differ at all from a slave, until the time appointed by the father’ (Galatians 4:1-3). Philosophers, then, are children, unless Christ has made them men. ‘For if the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free’ (Genesis 21:10, Galatians 4:30), at least he is the seed of Abraham, though not of promise, and receives what belongs to him by free gift. ‘But solid food belongs to those that are of full age, that is, those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Hebrews 5:14). ‘For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness; for he is a baby’ (Hebrews 5:13), and not yet acquainted with the word. He has believed and does good works, but is not able to give a reason from himself when asked. ‘Prove all things’, the Apostle says, ‘and hold fast that which is good’ (1 Thessalonians 5:21), speaking to spiritual men, who judge what is said according to truth, to determine whether it truly holds by the truth”.

To illustrate where this leads, Clement of Alexandria also spoke¹² of degrees of glory in heaven, in proportion to one’s faith and works. As we follow the path of righteousness, humbly submitting to the trials and tortures of this life, we move from one mansion to a greater one in our reward. Even unbelievers have this opportunity, through philosophy and the worship of the

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor or Pedagogue, I, 6.

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, I, 11.

¹² Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VI, 14.

heavenly bodies, if they respond to the Word of God in these things. Barbara and Catherine were able to find their place in the Kingdom of God, even though they were not born into it.

“‘And other sheep there are also, which are not of this fold’ (John 10:16), but are deemed worthy of another fold and mansion, in proportion to their faith. ‘My sheep hear My voice’ (John 10:27); that is, understand the commandments. And this is to be taken in a worthy acceptance, accompanied by works. So that when we hear, ‘Your faith has saved you’ (Mark 5:34), we do not understand Him to say absolutely that those who have believed in any way whatever shall be saved, unless works follow also. It was to the Jews alone that He spoke this, those who kept the Law and lived blamelessly, who wanted faith in the Lord. No one, then, can be a believer and at the same time be licentious; he must put off the passions, so as to be capable of reaching his own mansion”.

“Now to know is more than to believe, as to be dignified with honor after being saved is a greater thing than being saved. Accordingly the believer, through great discipline, divests himself of the passions, and passes to a mansion, which is better than the former one”.

“For instance, Solomon, calling those wise who understand, speaks of those who admire the dignity of his mansion. ‘For they shall see the end of the wise, and to what a degree the Lord has established him’ (Wisdom 4:17). And of his glory they will say at the Judgment, ‘This was he, whom we once held up to derision; fools that we were! We thought his life madness, and his end dishonorable. Now is he reckoned among the sons of God, and his inheritance is among the saints’” (Wisdom 5:3-5)

“Not only then the believer, but also the heathen, is judged most righteously. For since God knew, because of His omniscience, that he would not believe, He nevertheless, in order that he might receive his own perfection gave him philosophy, but gave it to him prior to faith. And He gave the sun, and the moon, and the stars to be worshipped. God made these for the nations, the Law says, that they might not become altogether atheistic¹³, and so utterly perish (Deuteronomy 4:19). But they have become devoid of sense, in spite of this commandment, and addicted themselves to graven images; they are judged unless they repent. Some of them, though able, would not believe God; others, though willing, did not take the necessary pains to become believers. There were also those who, from the worship of the heavenly bodies, did not return to the Maker of them. For this was the way given to the nations to rise up to God, by means of the worship of the heavenly bodies. But those who would not abide by those heavenly bodies assigned to them, but fell away from them to wood and stones, ‘were counted’, it is said, ‘as small dust and as a drop in a bucket’ (Isaiah 40:15), beyond salvation, cast away from the body”.

¹³ It was through viewing the stars and the beauty of nature that Barbara was led to faith in God. She realized that her pagan teachers and the idols they worshipped were counterfeits, and she sought more information about the true God. Catherine came on a similar path through the wisdom of ancient Philosophy.

Basil listed¹⁴ a number of blessings that we have through the Holy Spirit, including adoption as sons and daughters. Yet these are just the down payment and we see their grace dimly by reflection as if they were already established in fullness. Some people, who have been martyred, have undergone a special test by the Holy Spirit by being baptized in their own blood.

“Through the Holy Spirit comes

1. Our restoration to Paradise,
2. Our ascension into the kingdom of heaven,
3. Our return to the adoption of sons,
4. Our liberty to call God our Father,
5. Our being made partakers of the grace of Christ,
6. Our being called children of light,
7. Our sharing in eternal glory, and
8. Our being brought into a state of all “fullness of blessing,” (Romans 15:29)

both in this world and in the world to come. Of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise, through faith, we behold the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, and we await the full enjoyment. If this is the down payment, how much more is the perfection! If this is the first fruit, how much more is the complete fulfillment! Furthermore, from this too we may apprehend the difference between the grace that comes from the Spirit and the baptism by water: John baptized with water, but our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. ‘I baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ (Matthew 3:11). Here He calls the trial at the judgment the baptism of fire, as the apostle says, ‘The fire shall test every man’s work, of what sort it is’. ‘The day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire’ (1 Corinthians 3:13). There have been some who, in their championship of the true Faith, have undergone death for Christ’s sake, not in mere similitude, but in actual fact. They have needed none of the outward signs of water for their salvation, because they were baptized in their own blood”.

Putting On Christ

Besides being sons and daughters of God, we have put on Christ and are clothed with Christ because of our baptism (Galatians 3:26-27). This is something that the Martyrs Barbara and Catherine did in a very obvious fashion. There are implications of this regarding how we carry ourselves in our walk with God.

Gregory of Nazianzen spoke¹⁵ of our clothing in Christ as having two aspects: one in our preparation for Baptism; the other in our preserving the Baptismal Gift. Assisting us in this are the clothing of good works, done as to the Master Himself. Gregory gave a number of illustrations of how this works.

“We begin to struggle in a twofold conflict; first, to prepare ourselves for baptism by purifying ourselves; and next, to preserve the baptismal gift. It is a matter of equal difficulty to obtain a blessing, which we have not, and to keep it

¹⁴ Basil, On the Spirit, XIV, 36.

¹⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on Holy Baptism, XL, 31.

when we have gained it. Often what zeal has acquired, sloth has destroyed; and what hesitation has lost, diligence has regained”.

“A great assistance is vigils, fasts, tears and almsgiving. And let these be your thanksgiving for what you have received, and at the same time your safeguard of them. You have the benefit of many commandments to remind you; so do not transgress them. Does a poor man approach you? Remember how poor you once were, and how rich you were made. One in want of bread, perhaps another Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), is cast at your gate; respect the Sacramental Table to which you have approached, being consecrated by the Sufferings of Christ. If a homeless stranger falls at your feet, welcome him in; remember Him who for your sake was a stranger, who came to dwell in you by His grace, and who drew you towards the heavenly dwelling place. Be a Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9), who yesterday was a Publican, and is today a liberal soul; offer all to the coming in of Christ. A sick or a wounded man lies before you; respect your own health, and the wounds from which Christ delivered you. If you see someone naked clothe him, in honor of your own garment of incorruption, which is Christ, for as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). If you find a debtor falling at your feet (Matthew 18:23-35), tear up every document, whether just or unjust. Remember the 10,000 talents which Christ forgave you, and don’t be a harsh exactor of a smaller debt from your fellow servant, when you were forgiven so much more by the Master”.

Cyprian of Carthage stated¹⁶ that while we have put on Christ, the wisdom of God the Father, our most difficult task is watchfulness for our enemy creeping up on us secretly. This is how Adam and Eve fell! When he tried the same subterfuge with Christ, Christ recognized him and beat him back.

“The Lord warns us, saying, ‘You are the salt of the earth’ (Matthew 5:13). He wants us to be simple and yet prudent, to use foresight and watching with an anxious heart, both to perceive and to beware of the wiles of the crafty foe. We, who have put on Christ, who is the wisdom of God the Father, should not be lacking in wisdom in the matter of providing for our salvation. It is not persecution alone that is to be feared; nor those things, which advance by open attack to overwhelm the servants of God. Caution is easier where danger is clear, and the adversary announces himself. The enemy is more to be feared and to be guarded against, when he creeps up on us secretly. When he deceives by the appearance of peace, he steals forward by hidden approaches, which is why he has received the name of the Serpent. That is his subtlety; that is his dark and stealthy artifice for circumventing man. Thus from the very beginning of the world he deceived; and flattering with lying words, he misled inexperienced souls who were very gullible (Genesis 3:1-7). Thus he endeavored to tempt the Lord Himself. He secretly approached Him, as if he would creep up on Him again, and deceive; yet he was understood (Matthew 4:1-10), and beaten back, and therefore knocked down, because he was recognized and detected”.

¹⁶ Cyprian, Treatises, I, 1.

Jerome stated¹⁷ that we have put on Christ and we are a royal and priestly race looking forward to Christ's return in glory. By contrast, the Pharisees, who do not believe in the Lord's resurrection, are being made ready for the advent of Antichrist. When one of their number dies, they weep, go barefoot, crouch in sackcloth, roll in ashes and eat lentils, to show, it would seem, for what poor fare they have lost their birthright. We, who are clothed in Christ, are like the Old Testament priests. Just as they were not allowed to remove their priestly vestments to grieve for the dead, for the anointing oil of God was upon them (Leviticus 21:10-12, Luke 9:59-62), so we need not grieve for those who have gone to be with the Lord. No grief should distract a soul engaged in offering sacrifice to God, and wholly devoted to the Divine mysteries.

The Problem with a Garment of Wealth

One of the stealthy approaches that the Serpent makes comes through the cover of wealth. John Chrysostom wrote a great deal about the problems the people of his day had with wealth. He compared¹⁸ putting on Christ with wearing gold ornaments and with wearing the king's apparel. He stated that clothing oneself in gold, and living only for oneself, while someone else is starving, is sin. Even being clothed in royal garments pale compared to being clothed with the King of kings. The best looking clothes are alms, benevolence, modesty and humbleness.

“When you wear gold while another is perishing; when you, for vainglory, take so much gold, while another has not enough to eat, have you not increased your sins? Put Christ about you, and not gold. Where mammon is, Christ is not; where Christ is, mammon is not. Wouldn't you prefer to put on the King of all? If someone had offered you the purple, and the diadem, would you not have taken them before all the gold in the world? I give you not the regal ornaments, but I offer you to put on the King Himself. And how can one put on Christ? Hear Paul saying, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). Hear the Apostolic precept, ‘Make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts’ (Romans 13:14). In this way one puts on Christ, if one does not provide for the lust of the flesh. If you have put on Christ, even the demons will fear you. If all you put on is gold, even men will laugh you to scorn; if you put on Christ, men also will reverence you”.

“Do you want to appear good-looking? Clothe yourself in alms, benevolence, modesty and humbleness. These are all more precious than gold; these make even the beautiful yet more beautiful; these make even the maimed to be well formed. For when anyone looks at someone's face with good will, he gives his judgment from love; but an evil woman, even though she is beautiful, can't be called beautiful, because the mind is confounded and doesn't speak right”.

“That Egyptian woman of old was adorned; Joseph too was adorned (Genesis 39:6-20); which of them was the more beautiful? I don't mean when she was in the palace, and he in the prison. He was naked, but clothed in the garments of chastity. She was clothed, but more inappropriate than if she had been naked; for she didn't have modesty. When you are excessively adorned, then you have become more inappropriate than someone who is naked; for you have stripped

¹⁷ Jerome, Letter to Paula, XXXIX, 4.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, X, 4:3.

yourself of your fair adorning. Eve also was naked¹⁹; but when she had clothed herself (Genesis 3:7, 11), then was she more inappropriate. When she was naked, she was adorned with the glory of God; but when she had clothed herself with the garment of sin, then was she inappropriate”.

“If someone had given you kingly apparel, and you had taken a beggar’s clothing, and put it on top, besides the inappropriateness, you would also have been punished for doing this. You have put on the Lord of Heaven and of the Angels, and are you still busy with the things of earth?”

Chrysostom is not saying that rich people cannot be Christians. To define the problem of riches, Jesus gave an illustration of camels and needles (Matthew 19:24-26) that has been little understood in our generation. The main gates of most cities in ancient times were huge wooden structures set in an archway and often overlaid with brass for strength and 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. This is still the case today in some third world countries.

To deal with this situation, many ancient cities had a “needle’s eye gate” which was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed²⁰ on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus. A man could fit easily through the “needle’s eye gate”, but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel’s pack (which could weigh up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the “needle’s eye gate.”

The statement Jesus made, that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle’s eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, made use of this imagery. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The parable of the sower refers to this pack as “the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things” (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas (one of the Seventy) sold a large amount of property and brought the entire proceeds to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37). Ananias and Sapphira on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

The problem is not the wealth or pack itself, but its effect on our lives. The Patriarch Job was very wealthy (Job 1:1-3, 42:12-17), yet the Lord referred to him as a blameless and upright man who had no peers in his righteousness (Job 1:8, 2:3). In Jesus’ illustration, nothing is said about the camel’s pack being loaded back up once the camel is inside. The key here is

¹⁹ According to some of the Church Fathers, Adam and Eve were clothed in light prior to the Fall. Their appearance may have been similar to that of the righteous shining forth as the sun after the resurrection (Matthew 13:43). This would make sense: after they disobeyed God and the lights went out, then they noticed that they were naked! See for example Methodius, Banquet of the Ten Virgins, VIII, 5; IV, 5.

²⁰ Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, pp. 24-25

discerning the deceitfulness of wealth and the strength of its pull on one's heart. Job was able to let his pack be taken off without remorse. "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21; also Job 2:9-10). Many Christians throughout the ages have been unable or unwilling to continue fighting this pull and have taken oaths of poverty to thrust a sword (so to speak) into the heart of the demon of wealth. Other Christians have used their wealth to help others, and by doing so, they "plant" their wealth to grow treasure in heaven.

The Serpent's goal is getting us to feed ourselves with our wealth, and to become self-centered by it. The Early Church turned this completely around when everyone sold what they had, and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet.

The Garment of Celibacy

Celibacy is also a garment that can be put on, as a special calling (1 Corinthians 7:1-9), and not everyone is able to put this garment on. Some, like the Martyr Barbara, who pursued this calling, have a special relationship with God, and begin, in this life, to live as the angels do in heaven. Many of the Church Fathers interpreted Paul's words in the Epistle Lesson as referring to people living in celibacy, as we can see in the following quotes.

Gregory of Nyssa described²¹ celibacy as very similar to physical marriage, but in a spiritual sense, where it has many of the same features as physical marriage.

"It is impossible, as far as manual exercise goes, to ply two arts at once; for instance, farming and sailing, or tinkering and carpentry. If one is to pursue one, the other must be left alone. Similarly, there are two marriages for our choice, the one affected in the flesh, the other in the spirit; and preoccupation in the one must cause alienation from the other. Just as the tongue can't utter two different languages, like pronouncing a Hebrew word and a Greek word in the same moment, by analogy, our emotional powers don't possess a nature which can at pursue the pleasures of sense and court the spiritual union at the same time. When two masters are before us to choose between, we cannot be subject to both, for 'no man can serve two masters' (Matthew 6:24); he who is wise will choose the one most useful to himself. So when two marriages are before us to choose between, and we cannot contract both, for 'he that is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, but he that is married cares for the things of the world' (1 Corinthians 7:33-34), it would be the aim of a sound mind to choose the more profitable one".

"In the case of a marriage of this world a man who is anxious pays great attention to physical health, proper adornment, adequate means and the security from any disgraceful revelations regarding his relatives. By doing so, he thinks things will most likely to turn out as he wishes. In the same way the man who is courting the spiritual alliance will begin by the renewal of his mind (Ephesians 4:22-23). Next he will concentrate only in the heavenly treasures and not pride himself on worldly wealth. He will not exalt family distinction, but consider the successful efforts of his own zeal and labors. Strength and health he will perfect

²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity", *Ascetic and Moral Works*, II, 20.

by the Spirit's strength in the body's weakness, and not try to gain by bodily training and feeding. The suitor's gifts to the bride are contributed out of the wealth peculiar to the soul in such a wedding and are not procured by the money that perishes".

"Paul, that excellent adorer of the Bride, mentions what the wealth of those consists, and adds 'in chastity' (2 Corinthians 6:6); and besides this all the recognized fruits of the spirit are gifts of this marriage. Solomon spoke of taking for a helpmate and life companion that true Wisdom of which he says, 'Love her, and she shall keep you, honor her, that she may embrace you' (Proverbs 4:6-8 LXX). Thus he will prepare himself in a manner worthy of such a love. Then he will feast with all the joyous wedding guests in spotless clothing, rather than be cast out for not having put on the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11-12). It is plain that the argument applies equally to men and women, to move them towards such a marriage. 'There is neither male nor female' (Galatians 3:28), the Apostle says; 'Christ is all, and in all' (Colossians 3:11). He who is enamored of wisdom should hold the Object of his passionate desire, Who is the True Wisdom. The soul which cleaves to the undying Bridegroom should have the fruition of her love for the true Wisdom, which is God".

Jerome, a strong advocate of the celibate life, urged²² the widow Theodora, who had recently lost her husband, to remain unmarried. She and her husband had already begun to live the celibate life as brother and sister before he died. Now he is victorious and reigns with Christ, while she still struggles in this life. By living the celibate life, she prepares herself for how she will live after the Resurrection with the angels in their mode of life.

"While you regret the loss of your Lucinius, a true brother, rejoice as well that he now reigns with Christ. For, as it is written, he was 'taken away lest that wickedness should alter his understanding. For his soul pleased the Lord. And he, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time' (Wisdom 4:11-14). We may more rightly weep for ourselves that we stand daily in conflict with our sins, that we are stained with vices, that we receive wounds, and that we must give account for every idle word (Matthew 12:36). Victorious now and free from care he looks down upon you from on high and supports you in your struggle, and prepares for you a place near to himself. His love and affection towards you are still the same as when, disregarding his claim on you as a husband, he resolved to treat you even on earth as a sister, or indeed I may say as a brother, for difference of sex, while essential to marriage, is irrelevant to a celibate life. In the flesh, if we are born again in Christ, we are no longer Greek and Barbarian, bond and free, male and female, but are all one in Him (Galatians 3:28). How much more true will this be when this corruptible has put on incorruption and when this mortal has put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). 'In the resurrection', the Lord tells us, 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are as the angels in heaven' (Matthew 22:30). This means that there is no taking away of a natural and real body but only an indication of the greatness of the glory to come. For the words are not 'they shall be angels' but 'they shall be AS the angels'. Likeness to the

²² Jerome, Letter to Theodora, LXXV, 2.

angels is promised; identity with them is refused. They will not cease to be human! Glorious indeed they shall be, and graced with angelic splendor, but they will still be human; the Apostle Paul will still be Paul, Mary will still be Mary”.

Christ is Truly Man, Born of Mary

One of Paul’s statements in the Epistle Lesson played a key role in the Christological arguments of later centuries. “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law” (Galatians 4:4). This statement was quoted many times during the history of the Church to counter the statements of heretics.

For example, Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, had a good concise statement²³ of the relationship of Christ’s humanity to His Deity. This was something that the Arians of his day just could not comprehend.

“This union of God and man, whereby the Creator is joined to the creature, Arian blindness could not see with the eyes of intelligence. Not believing that the Only-begotten of God was of the same glory and substance with the Father, they spoke of the Son’s Godhead as inferior, drawing its arguments from those words ‘the form of a slave’ (Philippians 2:7). In order to show that ‘the form of a slave’ belongs to no other person in Himself, the same Son of God with the same form, says, ‘The Father is greater than I’ (John 14:28), just as He says with the same form, ‘I and my Father are one’ (John 10:30). For in ‘the form of a slave’, which He took at the end of the ages for our restoration, He is inferior to the Father. But in the form of God, in which He was before the ages, He is equal to the Father. In His human humiliation He was ‘made of a woman, made under the Law’ (Galatians 4:4); in His Divine majesty He remains the Word of God, ‘through whom all things were made’ (John 1:3). Accordingly, He Who in the form of God made man, in the form of a slave was made man. For both natures retain their own proper character without loss; as the form of God did not do away with the form of a slave, so the form of a slave did not impair the form of God. And so the mystery of power united to weakness, with respect to the same human nature, allows the Son to be called inferior to the Father. But the Godhead, which is One in the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, excludes all notion of inequality. For the eternity of the Trinity has nothing temporal, nothing dissimilar in nature. Its will is one, Its substance identical, Its power equal, and yet there are not three Gods, but one God; because it is a true and inseparable unity, where there can be no diversity. Thus in the whole and perfect nature of true man was true God born, complete in what was His own, complete in what was ours. And by ‘ours’ we mean what the Creator formed in us from the beginning, and what He undertook to repair. For what the deceiver brought in, and what man, when deceived, committed, had no trace in the Savior. Even though He partook of man’s weaknesses, He did not share our faults. He took the form of a slave without stain of sin, increasing the human and not diminishing the

²³ Leo the Great, Sermons, XXIII, 2.

divine. The ‘emptying of Himself’ (Philippians 2:7), whereby the Invisible made Himself visible, was the bending down of pity, not the failing of power”.

Athanasius of Alexandria compared²⁴ Christ with the Prophets, since the heretics of his day considered Christ to be another of the Prophets.

“Some say that the Word came upon one particular man, the Son of Mary, just as it came upon each of the Prophets, but their madness carries its own condemnation clearly with it. For if He came thus,

- (1) Why was that man born of a virgin, and not like others of a man and woman?
For in this way each of the saints also was begotten.
- (2) Why is not the death of each one said to have taken place on our behalf, but only this man’s death?
- (3) Why is it said only in the case of Him born of Mary that He sojourned here ‘once at the consummation of the ages?’ (Hebrews 9:26)
- (4) Why did the Son of Mary alone rise again on the third day?
- (5) Why is the Son of Mary alone called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), as though a Body filled full of the Godhead were born of her? For Emmanuel is interpreted ‘God with us’.
- (6) Why is it not said that when each of the saints ate, drank, labored, and died, that He (the Word) ate, drank, labored, and died, but only in the case of the Son of Mary. For the Word suffered in that Body. And while we are merely told of the others that they were born, and begotten, it is said in the case of the Son of Mary alone that ‘The Word was made Flesh’”.

“This proves that while to all the others the Word came, in order that they might prophesy, from Mary the Word Himself took flesh, and proceeded forth as man. He was by nature and essence the Word of God, but after the flesh man of the seed of David, and made of the flesh of Mary (Galatians 4:4, Romans 1:3). Him the Father pointed out both in Jordan and on the Mount, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’ (Matthew 3:17, 17:5; 2 Peter 3:17). Him the Arians denied, but we recognize and worship, not dividing the Son and the Word, but knowing that the Son is the Word Himself, by Whom all things are made, and by Whom we were redeemed”.

²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Personal Letter to Epictetus, II, lix, 11-12.