

SACRIFICE
THE PARALYTIC LOWERED THROUGH THE ROOF

August 4, 2024
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision B

Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8
Epistle: Romans 12:6-15

Today’s Gospel lesson is also used in the Orthodox lectionary for the second Sunday in Lent, but from the parallel reading in Mark 2. In the West, today’s Gospel lesson is used either on the 19th Sunday after Trinity (from Matthew) or on the 7th Sunday after Epiphany (from Mark). Today’s Epistle is used in the West either on the Second Sunday after Epiphany or on the 17th Sunday after Trinity.

Background for the Epistle to the Romans.....	731
Old Testament Sacrifice.....	733
Epistle: Romans 12:1-15.....	736
Why Offer Sacrifice?.....	737
A Living Sacrifice.....	739
The Mercies of God.....	744
Conformed to this World.....	746
Transformed.....	748
Thinking of Ourselves More Highly than We Ought.....	752
The Body of Christ.....	754
Members of Christ.....	757
The Gifts of God.....	762
Gifts We Give to God.....	762
Spiritual Gifts from God.....	764
Brotherly Love.....	767
Fervent in Spirit.....	771
Weep with Those Who Weep.....	773
Introduction to the Gospel Lesson.....	783
1 st Century Palestine House Construction.....	783
Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8; (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26).....	783
Jesus Forgives the Sins of the Paralytic.....	784
The Scribes and Pharisees Object to Jesus Forgiving Sins.....	789
The Deity of Christ.....	790
Jesus Gets Ostracized by the Religious Leaders.....	795

Background for the Epistle to the Romans

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey. He had already written 1 and 2 Corinthians on his way to Corinth. Although Paul had not visited the Church in Rome yet when he wrote this letter, a number of the Seventy Apostles were currently in Rome and had been sent there by Peter and Paul. For example, Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul had met in Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:1-2) and who Paul had left behind as bishop of Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), were now in Rome and the Church was meeting in

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their house (Romans 16:3-5). Others of the Seventy that were now in Rome in about 55 AD (from Romans 16) are listed in Table 1. Many had worked with Paul on his previous missionary journeys. Some were even Paul’s blood relatives. Others had worked with Peter, Andrew and Philip. Thus, the Church in Rome in 55 AD was unusual as a Church with 18 Apostles living there.

In Romans 1:7, Paul addresses the Epistle to “all who are in Rome,” that is, both Jew and Gentile. In Romans 2:17ff, Paul addressed some misguided Jews where he called them hypocrites. From the way Paul greeted the members of the Seventy (and others) in Romans 16, it seems pretty obvious that they agreed with what Paul was writing. The misguided Jews probably didn’t. When Paul finally arrived in Rome in about 60-61 AD (Acts 28), he met with the Jewish leaders (Acts 28:17) and reasoned with them a long time (Acts 28:17-23). Some were persuaded, others weren’t (Acts 28:24). They had wanted to talk to Paul himself since the Christians “had been spoken against everywhere” (Acts 28:22), mostly by Jewish leaders. As a result of this face-to-face meeting with Paul, the Jewish leaders in Rome had a great dispute among themselves (Acts 28:29). Thus, this Epistle to the Romans began a process that brought some of the Jews in Rome to the light while causing others to hate the light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19-21).

Table 1
Those of the Seventy Who Were in Rome¹ in 55 AD

Member of Seventy	Native To	Journey	Later Bishop of	Comments
Amplias		2, 3	Lydda, Odessus	
Andronicus & Junia	Tarsus	1, 2, 3	Pannonia in Illyricum	Prisoner with Paul
Apelles	Smyrna	2, 3	Smyrna	Acquaintance of Paul
Aquila & Priscilla	Pontus	2, 3, 4, 5	Ephesus before Timothy	Acts 18:19
Aristobulus	Cyprus	1, 2, 3	Sent to Britain	Barnabas’ brother
Asyncritus		3	Hyrcania (Persia)	Acquaintance of Paul
Epaenetus	Achaia	2, 3	Carthage, Spain	
Hermas		2, 3	Philippi	Wrote “Shepherd”
Hermes		3	Dalmatia	
Herodion	Tarsus	1, 2, 3, 5	Neoparthia, Patras	Martyred with Paul
Narcissus		2, 3	Athens after Dionysius	Acquaintance of Paul
Olympas		5	--	Beheaded with Paul
Patrobus		3	Naples, Puteoli	
Philologus & Julia		3	Sinope	
Phlegon		2, 3	Marathon (Thrace)	Worked with Luke
Rufus	Cyrene	1, 3	Thebes	
Stachys		2, 3	Byzantium	Met at Troas
Urbanus	Tarsus	2, 3	Tarsus, Macedonia	

In Romans 11:11ff and other places, Paul addressed Gentiles in the Church at Rome. Thus, the Roman Church consisted of a mixed Jew-Gentile population.

¹ For details, See Mark Kern, The Life of the Apostle Paul, St Athanasius Press, 2014.

From our viewpoint, we see Christians and Jews as distinct and separate groups. In 55 AD, the distinction was still very much blurred and would remain so until the mid-2nd century when Bar Kochba's revolt in Jerusalem made it obvious to everyone that the Jews were doing this and not the Christians. Thus, on Paul's missionary journeys, he often stopped in at the local synagogue first when he came to another city.

Old Testament Sacrifice

Both the Jews and Gentiles in Rome knew about the Jewish sacrificial practices. Three times per year (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles), the Jews in Rome were required by Mosaic Law to travel to Jerusalem and offer the required sacrifices. The Gentiles in Rome may have gone also if they had been Jewish proselytes.

The Mosaic Law specified a wide variety of sacrifices for various occasions and purposes. These are briefly summarized in Table 2.

These sacrifices appear also in the New Testament in different form. For example, the sin offering and the trespass offering were accomplished once for all by our Lord Jesus (Hebrews 10:14, 18-22, 26). He is also a burnt offering (Ephesians 5:2) where the sweet-smelling aroma is the Hebrew term "*reyach niychoach*" associated with the whole burnt offering that is totally consumed by fire. But we do this also. In the verses preceding the Epistle lesson, Paul urges the Romans to "present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1). Under house arrest in Rome, Paul received gifts from Philippi (brought by Epaphroditus) that he referred to as a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice (Philippians 4:15-18). Paul referred to himself as a drink offering poured out on the sacrifice and the liturgy of the Faith (Philippians 2:17).

This is not inconsistent with the Old Testament either. The Lord had said, "The sacrifice of praise will glorify Me; and that is the way wherein I will show to him the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23 LXX). David said, "I will praise the Name of God with song and shall magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it will please the Lord better than an ox or a young bull with horns and hoofs" (Psalm 69:30-31). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). Asaph, David's musician, psalm writer and prophet (1 Chronicles 16:7, 25:2) wrote: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High" (Psalm 50:14).

Paul also referred to himself as a liturgist (minister) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles sacrificing (ministering) the Gospel of God that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable (Romans 15:16). The word "offering" is the Greek word *prospora* which came to be the word used for the bread of the Lord's Supper. Greek words referring to sacrifice are:

Table 2
Old Testament Sacrifices

<i>Type of Sacrifice</i>	<i>Hebrew Word</i>	<i>Strong's Ref.</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Occasions For Use</i>
Sin offering	Chatta'th-An offense	2403	Unintentional sin: general forgiveness	All major festivals; consecration of priests; sins of ignorance; cleansing from defilement
Trespass offering	'asham = a fault or guilt	817	Guilt & damage of sin	Sins connected to holy things; fraud; rape; purification of lepers; defiled Nazarite
Burnt offering	Olah = ascending	5930	Entire surrender to God & ascending like smoke	Every morning & evening; all major festivals; consecration; purification; breach of vow; freewill; Gentiles could bring only this sacrifice
Peace offering 3 types: (1) Thank (2) Vow (3) Freewill	Zebah shelamim = a sacrifice of requital	2077+8002	Divine fellowship & communion	Inaugurations; anointing; Pentecost; festivals; vows or freewill; gratitude
Meal offering ² or drink offering	Minekhah = apportion nesek = libation	4503 5262	(1) Recognition of God's bounty (2) Good works	Always with burnt offerings, never with sin offerings; never by themselves; Temple Showbread; First-fruits of Passover; 2 loaves at Pentecost; daily by High Priest
Heave offering or Wave offering	Terumah = lifted up, raised Tenuphah = undulation	8641 8573	A method of presentation to the Lord	Heave offering: lifted up to the Lord; Wave offering: hands of priest and offerer together waved offering before Lord.

After his Third Missionary Journey, Paul arrived in Jerusalem and was purified according to the Laws involving a Nazarite (Acts 21:15-26). Later Paul testified before the governor Felix (Acts 24:17), that he came to Jerusalem bringing alms (Greek: *eleemosune* = mercies) and offerings (Greek: *prosphora*). The alms were an offering from the Churches in Achaia, Macedonia and Galatia for the Church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Paul explained to the Romans (Romans 15:27) that this was part of the liturgic (Greek: *leitourgeo*) work of the Church to do so. After all, the Lord had said, "I desire mercy (Greek: *eleos* = mercy) and not sacrifice (Greek: *thusia*). The Lord was not saying that

² A meal offering included flour or grain, oil, salt, incense and no leaven.

He didn't desire sacrifice, but that mercy is the most important ingredient for sacrifice. Paul says it very well, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices (Greek *thusia*) God is well pleased." In these two sentences are references to the thank offering (giving thanks to His Name) which is a peace offering, and to the Wave Offering of the First-fruits (the fruit of our lips).

Greek Word	Meaning
<i>Prospora</i> ³	gift or sacrifice
<i>thusia</i>	victims or act of immolation
<i>holokautoma</i> ⁴	whole burnt offering

In the Orthodox Liturgy, the words sacrifice, offering and gifts, are used at least fifteen times. For example, prior to the Anaphora, we say, "An offering of peace! A sacrifice of praise!" This is akin to the Old Testament peace offering. During the Anaphora we quote from the Scriptures about the Lord's Body and Blood (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and say, "We offer You Your Own, from what is Your Own, for everyone and for everything" (1 Chronicles 29:10-14). This is akin to the Old Testament meal offering and drink offering. Four times we say, "we offer You this spiritual and unbloody worship" because worship and sacrifice go together. At the beginning of the communion just before the Lord's Prayer, we ask, "that our God receive (the gifts) on His holy, most heavenly and ideal altar as a perfume of spiritual sweetness" This is akin to the Burnt Offering. Shortly thereafter, the gifts are elevated and the priest says, "The holy gifts for holy people!" This elevation is akin to the Heave Offering. Earlier in the Liturgy at the Entrance with the Gospel, we ask the Lord to "forgive us every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary. Sanctify our souls and bodies; grant that we may worship You in holiness all the days of our life". This is akin to the Sin Offering which preceded the others to sanctify the Old Testament believers from unintentional sin.

Saturday evening Great Vespers prepares us for this in the same way Moses prepared the people at Mt. Sinai to hear the Lord speak from the top of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:1-15). We refer to this in Great Vespers with the Words, "He looks on the earth and it trembles; He touches the hills and they smoke!" This is what happened when the Lord spoke from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20).

One part of the Mosaic Law given on Mt. Sinai was the Morning and Evening Continual Burnt Offering (Exodus 29:38-46). Matins and Vespers represent this today. For example, at Great Vespers we say, "Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice."

Following Great Vespers, there is a time for confession individually before a priest for those who wish to do so. This is akin to the Trespass Offering to free us from the guilt of known sins.

³ In the Orthodox Church, the Eucharist Bread is called "The Prospora".

⁴ From the Greek word holokautoma comes the Latin word holocaustum and the English word holocaust.

Thus, the Orthodox Liturgy, which had as its source the 1st century synagogue worship, contains references to most of the Old Testament sacrifices, but in a different form. This is what today's Epistle lesson speaks concerning.

Epistle: Romans 12:1-15

To understand the Epistle lesson, we need to begin with Romans 12:1. Paul said the following to the Romans, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship." The word "reasonable" is hard to translate exactly. In Greek it is *logikos* which is the adjective form of the Greek word *logos* meaning "The Word!" (John 1:1-14), thus meaning "worship of the Word." The reasonable worship is worshipping the Word. The mechanism Paul refers to here, the "living sacrifice", is the Whole Burnt Offering.

John Chrysostom gave⁵ some examples on how our body can become a living sacrifice. We need to pay attention to our own defects, just as those who offered animal sacrifices had to pay attention to whether the animal had a defect. Our bodies as a sacrifice are acceptable only when we clean up our act; we can become the priest of our own body.

"And how is the body to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look upon no evil thing and it has become a sacrifice. Let the tongue speak nothing filthy and it has become an offering. Let your hand do no lawless deed and it has become a whole burnt offering. Or rather this is not enough; we must have good works also. Let the hand do alms, let the mouth bless them that cross us, and let the hearing find leisure evermore in the reading of Scripture. For sacrifice allows no unclean thing: sacrifice is a first-fruit of the other actions. Let us then from our hands and feet and mouth and all other members, yield a first-fruit unto God."

"Since then the sacrifice is both to be presented as for a king's use and is a sacrifice, rid it of every spot, since if it has a spot, it will no longer be a sacrifice. The eye that looks lecherously cannot be sacrificed, nor the hand be presented that is grasping and rapacious, nor the feet that go lame and go to theaters. Neither can the belly that is the slave of self-indulgence and kindles lust after pleasures nor the heart that has rage in it and harlots' love, nor the tongue that utters filthy things. Hence we must spy out the spots on our body on every side. For if they that offered the sacrifices of old were asked to look on every side and were not permitted to offer an animal that was deformed, injured or sick (Leviticus 22:22-24); much more must we, who offer not senseless animals but ourselves, exhibit more strictness and be pure in all respects. Then we also may be able to say as did Paul, 'I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand'" (2 Timothy 4:6).

"Everyone can become the priest of his own body and of the virtue of our soul; as, for example, when we offer soberness, when we give alms, when we offer goodness and forbearance. For in doing this, we offer a reasonable worship".

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XX, v. 1.

From Table 2, the meaning of the Whole Burnt Offering is an entire surrender to God and an ascending like smoke. We are to be totally consumed. Much of the Epistle text consists in examples of how one can be the priest of his own body. We will get into more detail regarding these items later.

- Prophesying (v.6)
- Deaconing (v.7)
- Teaching (v.7)
- Exhorting (v.8)
- Leading with diligence (v.8)
- Showing mercy with cheerfulness (v.8)
- Showing love without hypocrisy (v.9)
- Abhorring evil; clinging to what is good (v.9)
- Being kindly affectionate to one another (v.10)
- In honor, giving preference to one another (v.10)
- Being fervent in spirit, not lagging in diligence, to serve the Lord (v.11)
- Rejoicing in hope (v.12)
- Being patient in tribulation (v.12)
- Continuing steadfast in prayer (v.12)
- Distributing to the needs of the saints (v.13)
- Given to hospitality (v.13)
- Blessing those who curse us (v.14)
- Rejoicing with those who rejoice; weeping with those who weep (v.15)

In introducing all these examples, Paul said, “Through the Grace given to me” (Romans 12:3). Whereas before he said, “By the *mercies* of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), here he mentions *Grace*, in order that we “not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think” (Romans 12:3, 16). Chrysostom spoke⁶ of lowliness of mind as being the mother of Good deeds, for we are members one of another and we are all connected in one body (Romans 12:4-5). Paul was very aware that the gifts he had been given were of Grace and regarded himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) since he had persecuted the Church before his conversion (1 Timothy 1:13, Acts 8:3).

Sacrifice in our day has even been institutionalized. Consider the origin of the Red Cross, most hospitals and many charitable organizations; many of these institutions owe their origin to the efforts of the people of God toward good deeds.

Why Offer Sacrifice?

Old Testament animal sacrifice represented atonement by substitution, called propitiation (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2), and all sacrifice anticipated the work of Christ. As people offered animal sacrifices in faith, they were forgiven (Leviticus 4:20ff, 5:10ff, 6:7, Numbers 15:25-28) and blessed (Leviticus 9:22-23, Numbers 6:22-26, Deuteronomy 21:5, 28:2-6), because they pointed forward to the work of Christ. Few people knew what the sacrifices meant, because the mystery of the Lord’s Incarnation had not been revealed yet (Romans 16:25-

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XX, v. 1.

26, Colossians 1:26-27, Ephesians 3:5-9). Even Satan didn't understand this mystery (1 Corinthians 2:7). Now that Christ's sacrifice has been made, we look backward to His one sacrifice. Animal sacrifices have been replaced with different forms of sacrifice, done in spirit and truth (John 4:23). "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

All sacrifice is an expression of love. The Mosaic Law can be summarized as love for God and love for neighbor, where the two go hand in hand, such that without both, one has neither (1 John 4:20). For more details on this, see Appendix A "The Mosaic Law", and Appendix B "The Ten Commandments". God expressed love for His people by the many provisions He made for them (Deuteronomy 7:8-10), and Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the Cross was the ultimate expression of the love of God for man (1 John 4:10, John 15:13). On the other hand, the offering of animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law was one way that men could express love for and devotion to God (Psalm 50:23). The animal sacrifices, which were required to be in Jerusalem, pointed to Christ offering Himself in Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-38), where the Lord's Name was established (Deuteronomy. 12:5).

Not anyone could bring an animal sacrifice as an acceptable offering to the Lord. A prerequisite was the elimination of all defilement (Leviticus 13:46, Numbers 5:3, 31:19, Deuteronomy 23:10-14). For example, Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable because of the defilement of his sin (Genesis 4:3-10). Even if both the Publican and the Pharisee brought an animal sacrifice, the Pharisee would not have been accepted due to his defilement from the sin of pride (Luke 18:10-14).

The Lord had said on several occasions, "I desire mercy not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 12:7). If sacrifice expresses love for God, then mercy expresses love for one's neighbor. For sacrifice to be acceptable before God, mercy must be present also (1 John 4:20). The Lord was not saying that He does not desire any sacrifice at any time, but that it is offensive to Him if it comes from an unmerciful heart (Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24), for mercy is an important ingredient for sacrifice.

Peter called us "living stones, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, who offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). He continued: we are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Peter 1:9-10). Each believer is the priest in charge of the temple of his own body, which is a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

Tertullian stated⁷ that we are a kingdom of priests to God the Father. Therefore since we live by Faith, we have the responsibility of a priest for our own body.

"Are not even we laymen priests? It is written, 'He has made us kings and priests to His God and Father' (Revelation 1:6). Where there is no ecclesiastical Order, you offer, and baptize, and are priest, alone for yourself. But where three are, a church is, albeit they are laymen. For each individual lives by his own faith, nor is there exception of persons with God; since it is not hearers of the Law

⁷ Tertullian, On Chastity IV, v, 7.

who are justified by the Lord, but doers (Romans 2:10-16). Therefore, if you have the *right* of a priest in your own person, in cases of necessity, it behooves you to have likewise the *discipline* of a priest whenever it may be necessary to have the right of a priest”.

Paul wrote, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship” (Romans 12:1). This is like the Whole Burnt Offering: an entire surrender to God and an ascending like smoke. We are to be totally consumed with the love of God. Paul then went on to give details on how one can be the priest of his own body (Romans 12:2-21).

A Living Sacrifice

Paul stated, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). If we present our bodies as a sacrifice, this means that we are all priests to God. There are several aspects to this “sacrifice”.

John Chrysostom defined⁸ just exactly what the living sacrifice is. It is holiness in our lives that is lit by the uncreated fire, and this is the sacrifice that God has always sought. Examples are David in his repentance and the Three Youths in the furnace. As we present them, we take no more self-interest in them, since they are not our own anymore (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As we present them, we need to make them approved, since the King of the Universe will come to dwell there.

“Paul asks us to ‘present our bodies a living sacrifice’ (Romans 12:1). How is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it has become a sacrifice; let the tongue speak nothing filthy, and it has become an offering; let the hand do no lawless deed, and it has become a whole burnt offering. Or rather this is not enough, but we must have good works also. Let the hand do alms, the mouth bless them that curse us, and the hearing find time for hearing the Scripture. For sacrifice allows no unclean thing; sacrifice is a first-fruit of the other actions. Let us then from our hands, feet and mouth, and all other members, yield a first-fruit to God. Such a sacrifice is well pleasing, as that of the Jews was unclean, for, ‘They shall not offer wine *offerings* to the Lord, nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him. *It shall be* like bread of mourners to them; all who eat it shall be defiled’ (Hosea 9:4). Not so ours. They presented the thing sacrificed dead; we make the thing sacrificed to be living. When we have mortified our members, then we shall be able to live. The Law of this sacrifice is new, and so the sort of fire is a marvelous one. It needs no wood or matter under it; but our fire lives by itself, and does not burn up the victim, but rather enlivens it. This was the sacrifice that God sought of old. Therefore the Prophet David said, ‘The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit’ (Psalm 51:17). The three Young Men offered this when they said, ‘At this time there is no prince, no prophet and no leader; there is no whole burnt offering, no sacrifice, no offering and no incense. There is no place to bear fruit before You and to find

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XX, v. 1.

mercy. Yet with a contrite soul and a humbled spirit may we receive mercy' (Daniel⁹ 3:38-39 OSB). Notice how Paul uses each word with great exactness. He does not say, offer (Exodus 29:39 LXX) your bodies as a sacrifice, but 'present' them, as if he had said, never more have any interest in them. You have given them up to another. Even those that furnish¹⁰ the war-horses have no further interest in them. We too have presented our members for the war against the devil and for that dread battle-array. Do not let them down to selfish uses. Paul shows another thing also from this, that one must make them approved, if one means to present them. It is not to any mortal being that we present them, but to God, the King of the universe; not to war only, but to have seated thereon the King Himself. He does not refuse even to be seated on our members, but even greatly desires it. What no king who is but our fellow-servant would choose to do, that the Lord of Angels chooses. Since it is both to be presented (i.e. as for a King's use) and is a sacrifice, rid it of every spot; if it has a spot, it will no longer be a sacrifice. The eye that looks lecherously cannot be sacrificed, nor can the hand be presented that is grasping and rapacious, nor the feet that go to play-houses, nor the belly that is the slave of self-indulgence and lusts after pleasures, nor the heart that has rage and harlots' love in it, nor the tongue that utters filthy things. We must spy out the spots on our body on every side. If those that offered the sacrifices of old were asked to look on every side, and were not permitted to offer an animal 'that is blind, with a cut tongue, with warts, skin disease or missing part of a tail' (Leviticus 22:22-23), much more must we. We offer not senseless animals, but ourselves, and we must exhibit more strictness, and be pure in all respects, that we also may be able to say as did Paul, 'I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand'" (2 Timothy 4:6).

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹¹ that the "living sacrifice" that we present has to do with the Eucharistic celebration in the Church that was present from the very beginning. This was also foretold by the prophets, and this a fulfillment of the Mosaic Law.

"Those who have become acquainted with the secondary (i.e., under Christ) Constitutions of the Apostles, are aware that the Lord instituted a new oblation in the new covenant, according to the declaration of Malachi the prophet. 'For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; in every place incense *shall be* offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations' (Malachi 1:11). John also declares this, 'The incense¹² is the prayers of the saints' (Revelation 5:8). Then again, Paul exhorts us 'to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service' (Romans 12:1). Again, 'Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips,

⁹ In the Septuagint (LXX) of the 1st Century, this was part of the Book of Daniel. Today it has been separated into the Old Testament Apocrypha book called "Song of the Three Youths".

¹⁰ That is "present them"; the same word.

¹¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus, 37.

¹² That the "incense" refers to the incense used during the celebration of the Eucharist, see:

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 41.

Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xvii, 5-6.

giving thanks to His name' (Hebrews 13:15). Now those oblations are not according to the Law, the handwriting of which the Lord took out of the way by canceling it (Colossians 2:14); but they are according to the Spirit, for we must worship God 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). And therefore the oblation of the Eucharist is not a carnal one, but a spiritual; and in this respect it is pure. For we make an oblation to God of the bread and the cup of blessing, giving Him thanks in that He has commanded the earth to bring forth these fruits for our nourishment. And then, when we have perfected the oblation, we invoke the Holy Spirit, that He may exhibit this sacrifice, both the bread the body of Christ, and the cup the blood of Christ, in order that the receivers of these antitypes may obtain remission of sins and life eternal."

John Chrysostom pointed out¹³ Paul's words saying that the Lord's Table is a tremendous benefit and treasure to mankind, who was without hope and without God in the world. When we partake of the one body of Christ, we also become the one Body of Christ.

"Paul said, 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the Blood of Christ?' (1 Corinthians 10:16) What are you saying, O blessed Paul? When you want to appeal to the hearer's reverence, when you are making mention of awesome mysteries, do you give the title of 'cup of blessing' to that fearful and most tremendous cup? 'Yes', he said; 'and no small title is that which was spoken. For when I call it "blessing", I mean thanksgiving, and when I call it thanksgiving I unfold all the treasure of God's goodness, and call to mind those mighty gifts'. (In the Liturgy) when we recount over the cup the unspeakable mercies of God and all that we have been made partakers of, let us draw near to Him and communicate. We give Him thanks that He has delivered from error the whole race of mankind; that being far off, He brought us near. When we had no hope and were without God in the world, He constituted us His own brethren and fellow-heirs. For these and all such things, we give thanks, thus we approach."

For what is the bread? The Body of Christ! And what do they become who partake of it? The Body of Christ; not many bodies, but one body! The bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains nowhere appear. They exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction. So are we joined both with each other and with Christ! There is not one body for us, and another for our neighbor to be nourished by, but the very same for all. Therefore Paul adds, 'We all partake of the one bread' (1 Corinthians 10:17). Now if we are all nourished by the same and all become the same, why do we not also show forth the same love, and become also in this respect one? This was the old way too in the time of our forefathers, 'for the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32).

Chrysostom continued to say¹⁴ that Jesus "Sanctified Himself" just before going to the Cross. This implies that as He presented His body as a living sacrifice, so we are to do so also. All Old Testament sacrifices were holy, since they were being given to God. Jesus was just doing what the Mosaic Law had said from the beginning.

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIV, 3-4.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXII, 1-2.

“‘And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth’ (John 17:19). What does it mean for Jesus to ‘sanctify Himself’? It means to ‘offer to God a sacrifice’, which He was about to do. Now all sacrifices are called ‘holy’, and those are especially called ‘holy things’, which are laid up for God. Whereas of old in type the sanctification was by the sheep, but now it is not in type, but by the truth itself; Jesus therefore said, ‘That they may be sanctified in Your truth’. ‘For I both dedicate them to God, and make them an offering’. This He said, both because their Head was being made so, and because they also were sacrificed; as Paul said, ‘Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy’ (Romans 12:1); and, ‘We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’ (Psalm 44:22). Jesus made them, without death, a sacrifice and offering; for He alluded to His own sacrifice, when He said, ‘I sanctify’. This is clear from what follows. ‘I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word’” (John 17:20).

Since Jesus was dying for them, He said, ‘For their sakes I sanctify Myself’. Lest anyone should think that He did this for the Apostles only, He added, ‘Neither pray I for these only, but for them also who believe on Me through their word’. By this again He revived their souls, showing that the disciples should be many. Because He made common what they possessed peculiarly, He comforted them by showing that they were being made the cause of the salvation of others. After having thus spoken concerning their salvation and their being sanctified by faith and the Sacrifice, He afterwards spoke of concord, and finally closed his discourse with this, having begun with it and ended in it. At the beginning He said, ‘A new commandment I give to you’ (John 13:34); and here, ‘That they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us’ (John 17:21).

Cyprian of Carthage stated¹⁵ that the living sacrifices can also be seen as the priests of the Church – who would normally offer the Eucharistic sacrifice – being sacrificed themselves in martyrdom during the various persecutions of the Church.

“But there cannot be felt any loss of faith, most beloved brethren, in the fact that now there is given no opportunity to God’s priests for offering and celebrating the divine sacrifices. You celebrate and offer a sacrifice to God equally precious and glorious¹⁶, and that will greatly profit you for the receipt of heavenly rewards. The sacred Scripture speaks, ‘The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart -- these, O God, You will not despise’ (Psalm 51:17). You offer this sacrifice to God; you celebrate this sacrifice without intermission day and night, being made victims to God, and exhibiting yourselves as holy and unspotted offerings. As Paul exhorts, ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,

¹⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, LXXVI, 3.

¹⁶ Some Protestant commentators state that these comments by Cyprian “disprove” that Paul’s reference to a living sacrifice refers to the Eucharistic sacrifice. Sometimes we can only see what we want to see.

that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”
(Romans 12:1-2)

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁷ that true worship of God is with the soul, not just the body. Jews and Samaritans were careless about the soul, but were very careful about cleansing the body in various ways. Since God is incorporeal, true worship must involve that in us which is incorporeal – the soul. We do that by circumcising our evil thoughts and sacrificing our unreasonable desires.

“To the Samaritan woman, Jesus spoke of the Church, that she is the ‘true’ worship, and such as is fit for God. ‘The Father is seeking such to worship Him’ (John 4:23). If then He in times past sought such as these, He allowed to those others (i.e. in Old Testament times) their way of worship, not willingly, but from condescension, and for this reason, that He might bring them in also. Who then are ‘the true worshipers’? Those who confine their service not by place, and who serve God in spirit! Paul phrased this, ‘Whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son’ (Romans 1:9). Again, ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service’ (Romans 12:1). But when he said, ‘God is Spirit’ (John 4:24), he declares nothing else than His incorporeal Nature. Now the service of that which is incorporeal must be of the same character, and must be offered by that in us which is incorporeal, namely, the soul, and purity of mind. Therefore He said, ‘those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth’ (John 4:24). Because both Samaritans and Jews were careless about the soul, but took great pains about the body, cleansing it in diverse ways, it is not, He said, by purity of body, but by that which is incorporeal in us, namely the mind, that the Incorporeal One is served. Sacrifice then not sheep and calves, but dedicate yourself to the Lord; make yourself a holocaust, this is to offer a living sacrifice. You must worship ‘in truth’; as former things were types, such as circumcision, whole burnt offerings, victims and incense, they now no longer exist, but all is ‘truth’. For a man must now circumcise not his flesh, but his evil thoughts, crucify himself, and remove and slay his unreasonable desires.”

Chrysostom noted¹⁸ that there are practical things we can do as priests of our own bodies. As a living sacrifice, we can quench lust, slay anger, abolish envy, and avoid a desire for money and malice.

“Let us follow Him, and take up the Cross. Though persecution is not present, yet the season for another kind of death is with us. ‘Put to death your members which are on the earth’ (Colossians 3:5). Let us then quench lust, slay anger, abolish envy. This is a ‘living sacrifice’ (Romans 12:1). This sacrifice doesn’t end in ashes, is not dispersed in smoke, lacks neither wood, fire nor knife. It has both fire and a knife, even the Holy Spirit. Using this knife, circumcise the superfluous and alien portion of your heart; open your closed ears, for vices and evil desires tend to block the way against the entrance of the word. The desire for money, when it is set before us, permits us not to hear the word concerning

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

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXIV, 3.

almsgiving; and malice when it is present raises a wall against the teaching concerning love.”

The Mercies of God

Paul stated, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1).

Why would “the mercies of God” be advocating that we present our bodies as a living sacrifice? God is certainly not demanding this! The answer is that there is a great benefit to us if we can do this.

John Chrysostom noted¹⁹ that because we don’t understand the mercies of God we often seek the things of this world instead of the things of God. Virtue and spiritual gifts are given by the mercies of God; if we understood that these are the important things, we would not seek worldly things.

“Why does God allow the wicked to be prosperous? We answer, ‘Because the judgment, according to what each deserves, does not take place here, but is reserved for the Second Coming. You say, ‘Well, give me here, and I won’t look for it then’. But it is because you seek here that you don’t receive. If earthly enjoyment was not within our reach, and we sought present things so eagerly as to prefer them to future, what would we do if we were in possession of unmixed pleasure? God therefore shows you that these things are nothing and trivial. You will agree that it is trivial whether one is tall or short, black or white; so is it whether one is rich or poor. Tell me, are not necessary things bestowed on all equally, just as the capacity for virtue and the distribution of spiritual gifts? If we understood rightly the mercies of God, we would not complain of lacking worldly things. We would enjoy these best gifts equally with others. If we knew about that equal distribution of spiritual gifts we would not desire superiority in the trivial things. It is like a servant enjoying from his master’s bounty food, clothing, and lodging, and all other necessities equally with his fellow servant; God withdraws those things from us, to extinguish this madness, and transfer our affections from them to heaven. But nevertheless we do not learn wisdom. As if a child possessing a toy, should prefer it to things necessary, and his father, to lead him against his will to what was better for him, should deprive him of his toy; so God takes these things from us, that He may lead us to heaven. If you ask then why He permits the wicked to be rich, it is because they are not high in His esteem. And if the righteous too are rich, it is rather that He allows it to be, than that He makes them so. They might gain wealth, but they do not seek it. When they might enjoy health, they mortify their bodies; when they might rise to glory, they make it their aim to be despised. There is no good man who ever studied to be bad. Let us therefore desist from seeking things below, and let us seek heavenly things; in doing so we shall be able to attain them, and we shall enjoy eternal delights.”

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, I, Moral.

Chrysostom also noted²⁰ that many people pray against their enemies when we are commanded to pray for our enemies. The mercies of God come from a heart that is willing to offer sacrifice. An example of this is the three youths in the Babylonian furnace: they didn't pray against Nebuchadnezzar, but prayed for their own forgiveness and offered themselves as a living sacrifice.

“Consider how many sacrifices there are in the Law; a sacrifice of praise, a sacrifice of acknowledgment, a sacrifice of peace, a sacrifice of purifications, and numberless others, and not one of them against enemies, but all in behalf of either one's own sins or one's own successes. When we come to God, He asks that we, ‘Pray for our enemies’ (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27, 35; Romans 12:14). How then can we cry against them? How can we beseech God to break His own Law? Why then do we wear the disguise of a supplicant, but have the words of an accuser? When we pray for ourselves, we scratch ourselves and yawn, and fall into ten thousand thoughts; but when against our enemies, we do so wakefully. Since the demons know that we are thrusting the sword against ourselves, he does not distract nor call us off then, that he may work in us the greater harm. Why not then pray against the demons, who injure us most of all? This we have been commanded to say, ‘Deliver us from the evil one’ (Luke 11:4). He is our irreconcilable foe; but our fellow man, do whatever he will, is a friend and brother. With the demons then let us all be angry; against them let us beseech God, saying, ‘Crush Satan under our feet’ (Romans 16:20), for they breed the enemies we have. Notice how many things the three youths suffered, though they had done no harm. They lost country, liberty, were taken captive and made slaves; and when carried away into a foreign and barbarous land, were even on the point of being slain on account of the dream, without cause or object (Daniel 2:13). When they had entered in with Daniel, what did they pray? What did they say? Crush Nebuchadnezzar; pull down his crown; hurl him from the throne? Nothing of this sort; but they desired the ‘mercies of God’ (Daniel 2:18 LXX). Similarly when they were in the furnace! But not so us; when we suffer far less than they, and oftentimes justly, we cease not to vent our complaints and curses.”

Chrysostom further pointed out²¹ how Paul's Epistle to Titus was full of the mercies of God and how He sets before us rewards that follow the mercies of God as the result of faith.

“Paul wrote that he was ‘an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness’ (Titus 1:1). There is a truth in other things that is not according to godliness. Knowledge in matters of agriculture, knowledge of the arts, is true knowledge; but the truth we seek is after godliness. Paul also wrote that he was ‘an apostle according to the faith of God's elect’ (Titus 1:1); this means that they believed, as the other elect believed, and acknowledged the truth. This acknowledging then is from faith, and not from reasoning.”

“Paul continued that he was an Apostle ‘in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began’ (Titus 1:2). Paul spoke of the

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, V, 5.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Titus, I, v.1.

present life, which is in the grace of God, and he also speaks of the future, and sets before us the rewards that follow the mercies which God has bestowed upon us. God is willing to crown us because we have believed and have been delivered from error. Observe how the introduction to Paul's Epistle to Titus is full of the mercies of God, and this whole Epistle is especially of the same character, thus exciting the holy man himself, and his disciples also, to greater exertions. Nothing profits us so much as constantly remembering the mercies of God, whether public or private. If our hearts are warmed when we receive the favors of our friends, or hear some kind word or deed of theirs, much more shall we be zealous in His service when we see into what dangers we had fallen, and how God has delivered us from them all."

Chrysostom continued to say²² that people who are asleep are often unaware of the mercies of God. As an example, Chrysostom pointed out how the Apostle Peter was delivered from prison. Peter wasn't even aware of the mercies of God until he was left alone in the streets.

"Peter was delivered to four quaternions²³ of soldiers to keep him and he didn't sing, he didn't watch, but he slept; neither had he been scourged. Yet the danger was greater than it was when he was imprisoned with Silas in Philippi. In Philippi, the prisoners Paul and Silas had undergone their punishment; but in Jerusalem it was yet to come. Though there were no stripes to torture him, yet was there the anticipation of the future to distress him. Note the miracle there. 'Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!". Peter's chains fell off his hands' (Acts 12:7). In order that Peter might not imagine the events were the work of the light alone, the angel also struck Peter. Now no one saw the light, except Peter himself, and he thought it was a vision. So insensible are they that are asleep to the mercies of God. 'The angel said to Peter, 'Gird yourself and bind on your sandals'; and he did so. Then the angel said to Peter, 'Put on your clothes and follow me'. Peter went out and followed, but he didn't know if it was real which was done by the angel; but he thought he was seeing a vision. 'When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him'" (Acts 12:8-10).

Conformed to this World

Paul stated, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

John Chrysostom stated²⁴ that we have come to something far greater than what Israel saw in the days of Moses. The people needed a veil over Moses' face in order to look at him; but

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, vv. 1-2.

²³ A quaternion was a cell or group of four soldiers.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VII, 5.

we look at the Holy Spirit with no veil. And we are transformed into His image. This is quite the opposite of being conformed to this world.

“Paul said, ‘But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Notice how Paul places the Spirit in the rank of God, and raises them up to the rank of the Apostles. For he said before, ‘You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God’ (2 Corinthians 3:2-3); and here, ‘But we all with unveiled face’. They came, like Moses, bringing a Law. But we needed no veil (Exodus 34:34-36); so neither you who received it. Yet this glory is far greater, for this is not of our countenance, but of the Spirit; but nevertheless you are able as well as we to look steadfastly on it. Israel could not even by a mediator look at it; but you even without a mediator can look steadfastly on a greater. They were not able to look on that of Moses, you even look on that of the Spirit.”

“What does it mean, ‘beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image? This was shown more clearly when the gifts of miracles were in operation; however it is not difficult now to see it either, for one who has believing eyes. As soon as we are baptized, the soul beams even more than the sun, being cleansed by the Spirit; and not only do we behold the glory of God, but from it we also receive a sort of splendor. Just as if pure silver were turned towards the sun’s rays, it will itself also shoot forth rays, not from its own natural property but also from the solar luster. So also the soul: being cleansed and made brighter than silver, it receives a ray from the glory of the Spirit, and sends it back. Therefore Paul said, ‘beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory’, that of the Spirit, ‘to glory’, our own, that which is generated in us; and that, of such sort, as one might expect from the Lord Spirit. Notice how here Paul calls the Spirit, Lord. In other places too one may see that Lordship of His. ‘As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”’ (Acts 13:2). Therefore Paul said this in order to show the Spirit’s equality in honor. Christ had said, ‘The servant does not know what his master is doing’; but even as a man knows his own things, so does the Spirit know the things of God. Also the working as He wills shows His authority and Lordship. This transforms us. This does not allow us to be conformed to this world; for This is the Author of creation. As Paul said, ‘We are created in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:10). So also David said, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in my inward parts”’ (Psalm 51:10 LXX).

Gregory of Nyssa stressed²⁵ the contrast between those who have presented their bodies a living sacrifice and those who are conformed to this world. The first walks in newness of life, is a priest to God, is strengthened in the inner man. He doesn’t offer unclean sacrifices, but reigns with Christ and lives like angels. This is the crown of every hope, of every desire, of every

²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, “On Virginitly”, in Ascetic and Moral Works, Chapter 24.

blessing, and of every promise of God, and of all those unspeakable delights which we believe to exist beyond our perception and our knowledge.

“How can we obey Paul when he exhorts us ‘to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God’ (Romans 12:1), when we are ‘conformed to this world’, and not transformed by the renewing of our mind, when we are not ‘walking in this newness of life’, but still pursuing the routine of ‘the old man’? (Romans 6:4-6) How can we be a priest to God (Revelation 1:6), anointed though we are for this very office, to offer a gift to God? This is a gift that is in no way another’s, not a counterfeited gift from sources outside ourselves, but a gift that is really our own, namely, ‘strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man’ (Ephesians 3:16), who must be perfect and blameless, as it is required of a lamb to be without spot or blemish. How can we offer this to God, when we do not listen to the Law forbidding the unclean to offer sacrifices? If we long for God to manifest Himself to us, why do we not hear Moses, when he commands the people to be pure from the stains of marriage that they may take in the vision of God? (Exodus 19:15) Does all this seem little in our eyes, to be crucified with Christ, to present ourselves a sacrifice to God, to become a priest to the Most High God, to make ourselves worthy of the vision of the Almighty? What higher blessings than these can we imagine for ourselves? The consequence of being crucified with Christ is that we shall live with Him, be glorified with Him and reign with Him; and the consequence of presenting ourselves to God is that we shall be changed from the rank of human nature and human dignity to that of Angels. Daniel speaks of this, ‘A river of fire issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands served Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him’ (Daniel 7:10). He too who has taken his share in the true priesthood and placed himself beside the Great High Priest remains altogether himself a priest forever, prevented for eternity from remaining any more in death. To say that one makes oneself worthy to see God produces no less a result than this. This is the crown of every hope, of every desire, of every blessing, and of every promise of God, and of all those unspeakable delights which we believe to exist beyond our perception and our knowledge. Moses longed earnestly to see it, and many prophets and kings have desired to see the same. But the only class deemed worthy of it are the pure in heart, those who are, and are named ‘blessed’, for this very reason that ‘they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). Therefore we wish that all should become crucified with Christ, a holy priest standing before God, a pure offering in all chastity, preparing ourselves by our own holiness for God’s coming; that we also may have a pure heart in which to see God, according to the promise of God, and of our Savior Jesus Christ.”

Transformed

Paul stated, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Just as Christ was transformed in His humanity, so we shall be.

Gregory of Nyssa wrote²⁶ of how our transformation was modeled on that of Christ in His humanity. His Deity was and will be always the same. However in His humanity, His soul was severed from His body in the grave. By His Resurrection, He gave to all humanity a beginning and an example of our transformation to the Divine nature by His union with God.

“The Lord Jesus foretold that at the time of His Passion He would voluntarily detach His soul from His body, saying, ‘No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again’ (John 10:18). The prophet David also, according to the interpretation of the great Peter, said with foresight of Him, ‘You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption’ (Psalm 16:10). While the Apostle Peter thus expounds this saying that ‘His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption’ (Acts 2:31). His Godhead was the same before He took flesh, while He was in the flesh and after His Passion; His Godhead is immutably the same, being at all times what It was by nature, and so continuing forever. But in the suffering of His human nature the Godhead fulfilled the dispensation for our benefit by severing the soul for a season from the body, yet without being Itself separated from either of those elements to which it was once for all united. By joining again the elements which had been thus parted, He gave to all human nature a beginning and an example which it should follow by the resurrection from the dead, that all the corruptible may put on incorruption, and all the mortal may put on immortality. Our first-fruits (i.e. Christ in the flesh) was transformed to the Divine nature by its union with God. As Peter said, ‘God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2:36). We might cite many passages of Scripture to support such a position, showing how the Lord, reconciling the world to Himself by the Humanity of Christ, apportioned His work of benevolence to men between His soul and His body, willing through His soul and touching them through His body.”

Gregory of Nyssa continued, writing to oppose the heretic Eunomius, pointing out²⁷ that Christ’s human nature was transformed into Divine as a result of the Resurrection. The same happens to our human nature.

“The Only-begotten God, Who is in the bosom of the Father, being Word, King and Lord, and all that is exalted in word and thought, doesn’t need to become anything that is good, seeing that He is Himself the fullness of all good things. Yet He changed into what He was not before! He Who never knew sin became sin, that He may take away the sin of the world. On the other hand the flesh which received the Lord became Christ and Lord, being transformed by the commixture into that which it was not by nature. From this we learn that neither would God have been manifested in the flesh, had not the Word been made flesh, nor would the human flesh that compassed Him about have been transformed to what is Divine, had not that which was apparent to the senses become Christ and Lord.”

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II, 13.

²⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 4.

Hilary of Poitiers pointed out²⁸ how Christ's humanity was glorified. In His Divinity, He had always been glorified. Without abdicating His Divinity, He took on our nature from Mary. As Man, He prayed that our nature might take on the glory that He always had as our humanity was transformed into the power of God and the purity of the Spirit.

“Because the Son of God, all-perfect and born from everlasting in the fullness of the Godhead, had now by incarnation become Man and was ready for His death, He prayed that He may be glorified with God, even as He was glorifying His Father on the earth. At that moment the powers of God were being glorified in the flesh before the eyes of a world that didn't know Him. But what is this glory with the Father, for which He looks? It is that, of course, which He had with Him before the world was. He had the fullness of the Godhead; He has it still, for He is God's Son. But He Who was the Son of God had become the Son of man also, for The Word was made flesh. He had not lost His former being, but He had become what He was not before; He had not abdicated His own position, yet He had taken ours. He prayed that the nature which He had assumed may be promoted to the glory which He had never renounced. The Son is the Word, and the Word was made flesh; the Word was God, and was in the beginning with God, and the Word was Son before the foundation of the world. This Son, now incarnate, prayed that flesh might be to the Father what the Son had been. He prayed that flesh, born in time, might receive the splendor of the everlasting glory, that the corruption of the flesh might be swallowed up, transformed into the power of God and the purity of the Spirit. This is His prayer to God, the Son's confession of the Father, the entreaty of that flesh wherein all shall see Him on the Judgment-day, pierced and bearing the marks of the cross. It is in that flesh wherein His glory was shown on the Mount of Olives, where He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, that Paul saw Him, and Stephen paid Him worship.”

John Chrysostom spoke of our transformation as illustrated by some dramatic examples. Those who put His commands into practice immediately become like angels and like God, as far as we are able to become.

“For God will not make it beautiful and excellent, if it is reluctant and if it has to be constrained by force, for this is not virtue at all; He must persuade it to become so of its own will and choice. So this cure is more difficult; yet even this succeeded, and every kind of wickedness was banished. He reordered the bodies which He cured, not to health only, but to the highest vigor, so did He not merely deliver the souls from extreme wickedness, but brought them to the very summit of excellence. A publican became an Apostle²⁹; a persecutor, blasphemer and injurious man appeared as herald to the world³⁰; the Magi became teachers of the Jews³¹; a thief was declared a citizen of Paradise³². Two harlots shone forth by the greatness of their faith; one harlot of Samaria³³ undertook to preach the Gospel to

²⁸ Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, III, 16.

²⁹ That is Matthew, also called Levi; see Mark 2:14

³⁰ That is, Paul; see Acts 9, 22, 26.

³¹ See Matthew 2.

³² See Luke 23:39-43.

³³ See John 4.

her countrymen, and having enclosed a whole city in her net, so brought them to Christ. The other of Canaan³⁴, by faith and perseverance, procured the expulsion of an evil spirit from her daughter's soul. Many others much worse than these were immediately numbered in the rank of disciples, and at once all the infirmities of their bodies and diseases of their souls were transformed and they were fashioned anew to health and exact virtue. And of these, not two or three men, but nations, were very easily remodeled. Why should one speak of the wisdom of the commands, the excellence of the heavenly laws, the good ordering of the angelic government? Such a life has He proposed to us, such laws appointed for us, such a government established, that those who put these things into practice immediately become angels and like God, as far as is in our power, even though they may have been worse than all men."

Chrysostom also pointed out³⁵ that we are transformed into the Image of God by the entire Trinity, and that this is a greater event than the Creation of the world. Those in the days of Moses did not have this benefit.

"Notice how to those who were desirous of seeing that surpassing glory, I mean that of Moses, he shows it flashing with added luster to us? 'As on the face of Moses, so also has it shined into your hearts' (2 Corinthians 4:6). First, he reminds them of what was made in the beginning of the Creation, tangible light and darkness, showing that this (New Testament) creation is greater. Where did He command light to shine out of darkness? In the beginning and in prelude to the Creation; for He said, 'Darkness was on the face of the deep. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light' (Genesis 1:2-3). Why did He then say, 'Let it be, and it was', but now He said nothing, but Himself became Light for us? He didn't say, 'He commanded light', but 'has Himself shined'. Therefore neither do we see tangible objects by the shining of this Light, but we see God Himself through Christ. Notice that this is an act of the entire Trinity! For of the Spirit, he says, 'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Lord Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18). And of the Son; "That the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them' (2 Corinthians 4:4). And of the Father; 'He commanded Light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6). When he had said, 'Of the Gospel of the glory of Christ', he added, 'Who is the Image of God', showing that those in the days of Moses were deprived of His glory also. So after saying, 'the knowledge of the glory of God', he added, 'in the face of Christ', to show that through Him we know the Father, even as through the Spirit also we are brought to Him.

Gregory of Nyssa stated³⁶ that our transformation³⁶ from corruptible to the incorruptible is according to the Apostolic Faith that was handed down. Any alteration is a lie.

³⁴ See Matthew 15:22-28, Mark 7:24-30.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VIII, 3.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 1.

“We believe, then, just as the Lord set forth the Faith to His Disciples, when He said, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matthew 28:19). This is the word of the mystery whereby through the new birth from above our nature is transformed from the corruptible to the incorruptible, being renewed from ‘the old man’, ‘according to the image of Him who created him’ (Colossians 3:10) at the beginning in the likeness to the Godhead. In the Faith which was delivered by God to the Apostles we admit neither subtraction, nor alteration, nor addition, knowing assuredly that he who presumes to pervert the Divine utterance by dishonest quibbling, the same ‘is of his father the devil’. He leaves the words of truth and ‘speaks from his own resources’, becoming the father of a lie (John 8:44). For whatever is said other than in exact accord with the truth is assuredly false and not true.”

Thinking of Ourselves More Highly than We Ought

Paul said, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). One characteristic common among heretics throughout the ages is an exalted opinion of themselves in that they claimed to “know” more about God than anyone else. In their lack of humility, they were led astray by their father into all kinds of strange teachings, like the blind leading the blind. Paul addresses this more specifically elsewhere³⁷.

Gregory of Nyssa, in opposing the heretic Eunomius, stated³⁸ that it was Church tradition “not to think *of oneself* more highly than he ought to think”. This applies especially to discussions about the Essence of God. We need to be careful in trying to apply human terms to describe what is incomprehensible, infinite and unknowable.

“If anyone should ask for some interpretation, description and explanation of the Divine essence, we acknowledge that in this kind of wisdom we are unlearned and admit that it is not possible that any conception expressed by words should comprehend that which is by nature infinite. The fact that the Divine greatness has no limit is proclaimed by prophecy, which declares expressly that of His splendor, His glory, His holiness, ‘has no limit’ (Psalm 145:3 LXX). If His surroundings have no limit, much more is He Himself in His essence, whatever it may be, comprehended by no limitation in any way. If then interpretation by way of words and names implies by its meaning some sort of comprehension of the subject, and if, on the other hand, that which is unlimited cannot be comprehended, no one can blame us for ignorance; we will not boldly venture into what no one should venture upon. For by what name can I describe the incomprehensible? By what speech can I declare the unspeakable? Accordingly, since the Deity is too excellent and lofty to be expressed in words, we have learned to honor in silence what transcends speech and thought. There may be

³⁷ For example, see 2 Timothy 3:6-9, where Jannes and Jambres were the magicians (i.e. heretics) that Moses opposed in Egypt (Exodus 7:11, 8:7, 8:18-19, 9:11).

³⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, III, 5.

some who ‘think of themselves more highly than they ought to think’ (Romans 12:3) and trample upon this cautious speech of ours making a jest of our ignorance of things incomprehensible. They may recognize a difference of unlikeness in that which is without figure, limit, size, or quantity (I mean in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). They may come forward to reproach our ignorance using that phrase which is continually alleged by the disciples of deceit, ‘You worship what you do not know’ (John 4:22); they may say that we don’t know the essence of that which we worship; however, we shall follow the advice of the prophet (Isaiah 51:7), and not fear the reproach of men.”

Irenaeus of Lyons outlined³⁹ the techniques characteristic of the heretics: they claim to know something more than revealed truth about God. As such, they are the blind led by the blind, and think of themselves more highly than they should. In contrast the Church is like a garden where we may eat of every tree of the Scriptures; but we should not eat with an exalted mind or get into discord.

“All the heretics imagine that they have hit upon something more beyond the truth; by following those things I already mentioned, the heretics proceed on their way variously, inharmoniously, and foolishly. They do not keep always to the same opinions with regard to the same things; as blind men are led by the blind, they shall deservedly fall into the ditch of ignorance lying in their path, ‘always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (2 Timothy 3:7). It behooves us, therefore, to avoid their doctrines, and to pay careful attention lest we suffer any injury from them. We can always flee to the Church, and be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord’s Scriptures. For the Church has been planted as a garden in this world; therefore says the Spirit of God, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat’ (Genesis 2:16), that is, ‘Eat from every Scripture of the Lord’. But we shall not eat with an uplifted mind, nor touch any heretical discord. For these men profess that they have themselves the knowledge of good and evil; and they set their own impious minds above the God who made them. They therefore form opinions on what is beyond the limits of the understanding. For this cause Paul says, ‘Do not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith’ (Romans 12:3), that we are not cast out by eating of the ‘knowledge’ of these men (that knowledge which knows more than it should) from the paradise of life. Into this paradise the Lord has introduced those who obey His call, ‘where He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him’ (Ephesians 1:10). But the things in heaven are spiritual, while those on earth deal with human nature. These things, therefore, He recapitulated in Himself; by uniting man to the Spirit, and causing the Spirit to dwell in man, He gives the Spirit to be the head of man; for through Him (the Spirit) we see, hear and speak.”

Gregory the Great stated⁴⁰ that the thinking of ourselves properly was illustrated by the vestments of the Old Testament priests. The priests’ vestments had bells sewn in, which speak

³⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, V, xx, 2.

⁴⁰ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 4.

of the preaching of the priests. Without this, the priest dies⁴¹. The vestments themselves are the righteous works of the priests; salt must be present also, which is the wisdom to avoid thinking of himself more highly than he should. Added to the bells are pomegranates, which have many seeds within one rind; the pomegranates speak of the unity of the Faith which the priest must preserve.

“Whoever enters the priesthood undertakes the office of a herald, so as to walk, himself crying aloud, before the coming of the judge who follows with awesome judgment. If the priest doesn’t know how to preach, what voice of a loud cry shall the mute herald utter? This is why the Holy Spirit sat upon the first pastors under the appearance of tongues (Acts 2:3); whomever He has filled, He Himself at once makes eloquent. Therefore Moses was commanded that when the priest goes into the tabernacle he shall be surrounded with bells (Exodus 28:33); that is, he shall have about him the sounds of preaching, lest he provoke by his silence the judgment of Him Who beholds him from above. For it is written, ‘Its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy *place* before the Lord and when he comes out, that he may not die’ (Exodus 28:35). For the priest, when he goes in or comes out, dies if a sound is not heard from him, because he provokes the wrath of the hidden judge, if he goes without the sound of preaching. The bells are aptly described as inserted in his vestments. For what else ought we to take the vestments of the priest to be but righteous works; as the prophet attests when he says, ‘Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness’ (Psalm 132:9)? The bells, therefore, are inherent in his vestments to signify that the very works of the priest should also proclaim the way of life together with the sound of his tongue. When the ruler prepares himself for speaking, let him bear in mind with what studious caution he ought to speak. If he is hurried too much into speaking, the hearts of hearers are smitten with the wound of error and, while he perchance desires to seem wise he unwisely severs the bond of unity. On this account the Truth says, ‘Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another’ (Mark 9:50). By salt is denoted the word of wisdom. Let him, therefore, who strives to speak wisely fear greatly, lest by his eloquence the unity of his hearers be disturbed. Hence Paul says, ‘Do not to think *of yourself* more highly than you ought to think, but think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith’ (Romans 12:3). In the priest’s vestment, according to Divine precept, pomegranates are added to the bells (Exodus 38:34). For what is signified by pomegranates but the unity of the faith? Within a pomegranate many seeds are protected by one outer rind; so the unity of the faith comprehends the innumerable peoples of the holy Church, whom a diversity of merits retains within her. If a ruler should be unadvisedly hurried into speaking, the Truth in person proclaims to His disciples this which we have already cited, have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. It is as though He should say in a figure through the dress of the priest, ‘Join pomegranates with bells, that in all we say we may with cautious watchfulness keep the unity of the faith’”.

⁴¹ The priests were required to follow the Lord’s instruction exactly. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron didn’t do that and paid for it with their lives (Leviticus 10:1-3).

The Body of Christ

John Chrysostom stated⁴² that Paul wrote to the Corinthians to correct a serious problem where some members of the body who had greater spiritual gifts had exalted themselves against those who had the lesser gifts, making them jealous. This resulted in a loss of love among the members of the Body of Christ. There was a similar situation developing in Rome, but not as serious yet; therefore Paul said,

‘For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness’ (Romans 12:4-8).

Paul said, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:4-5). John Chrysostom had a great deal to say on this subject – more than most of the other Church Fathers combined. In this section and the next, we take a look at what Chrysostom had to say.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁴³ that the Church, the Body of Christ, is both one and many at the same time. One member can’t make up the Body; all are equal in this respect. Yet Paul calls the Body together by the Name “Christ”.

“Nothing so consoles the person of small spirit and inferior gifts, or so persuades him not to grieve, as the being convinced that he is not left with less than his share. Paul makes this point, ‘As the body is one and has many members’” (1 Corinthians 12:12).

“Paul is pointing out the same thing (i.e. the Church) to be both one and many at the same time. Paul adds, pressing the point more vigorously, ‘and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body’. He didn’t say, ‘being many, are of one body’, but ‘the one body itself is many’; and those many members are this one thing. If therefore the one is many, and the many are one, where is the difference? Where is the superiority? Where is the disadvantage? When considered as to their particular natures, then the difference comes out, and the difference is in all alike. For none of them by itself can make a body, but each is alike deficient in the making a body, and there is need of a coming together since when the many become one, then and not till then is there one body. Covertly intimating this very thing, he said, ‘All the members of the one body, being many, are one body’”.

“How is it possible that they should be one? When throwing out the difference between the members, we consider the body. For the same thing which the eye is, this also is the foot in regard to its being a member and constituting a

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIX, 1

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXX, 1.

body. There is no difference in this respect. Nor can we say that one of the members makes a body by itself, but another does not. They are all equal in this, for the very reason that they are all one body.”

“Having said this and having shown it clearly from the common judgment of all, Paul added, ‘so also is Christ’. Paul should have said, ‘so also is the Church’, for this was the natural consequence; he does not say it but instead places the name of Christ, carrying the discourse up on high and appealing more and more to the hearer’s reverence. His meaning is this: ‘So also is the body of Christ, which is the Church’. As the body and the head are one man, so he said that the Church and Christ are one. Therefore Paul mentioned Christ instead of the Church, giving that Name to His Body. ‘As then’, Paul said, ‘our body is one thing though it is composed of many: so also in the Church we all are one thing’”.

Chrysostom noted⁴⁴ that the making of the Body occurred at our baptism, where we were made to drink into one Spirit. This is the wonder and excellence of the Body: when things so diverse make one.

“One Spirit both formed us and gathered us all together into one body; for this is the meaning of, ‘we were baptized into one body’ (1 Corinthians 12:13). One Spirit also granted us one Table, and gave us all the same watering, for this is the meaning of, ‘we were made to drink into one Spirit’ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit united persons so widely separated; and if many things then become a body when they are made one, why do we continually toss to and fro their difference? Someone may say, ‘Because there are many members and diverse’, and dwell on the differences; know that this very thing is the wonder and the peculiar excellency of the body, when the things which are many and diverse make one. But if they were not many, it would not be so wonderful and incredible that they should be one body; rather they would not be a body at all.”

Chrysostom further pointed out⁴⁵ how Christian marriage illustrates the oneness of the Body of Christ. In marriage, we are like Christ and the Church in a great mystery. Marriage among the Greeks was entirely unlike this. Christian marriage is a mystery of the love of God and there is great power in that union.

“Marriage is a mystery and a type of a mighty thing; and even if you don’t respect it, respect whose type it is. ‘This is a great mystery’, Paul said, ‘but I speak concerning Christ and of the Church’ (Ephesians 5:32). It is a type of the Church and of Christ, and do you bring harlots to it? Someone said, ‘If neither virgins dance, nor the married, who is to dance?’ No one! What need is there of dancing? In the Grecian mysteries there is dancing, but in ours, silence, decency, modesty and bashfulness. A great mystery is being celebrated: out with the harlots! Out with the profane! How is it a mystery? They come together, and the two make one. Why is it that at Christ’s entrance, there was no dancing, no cymbals, but great silence, great stillness? When Christ and the Church come together, they don’t make a lifeless image or the image of anything on earth, but of God Himself, and after His likeness. The Greeks introduce so great an uproar,

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXX, 2.

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, XII, v. 18.

and disturb those who are there; you put the soul to shame, and confound it! Christ and the Church come, about to be made one body. Notice again a mystery of love! If the two don't become one, so long as they continue two, they don't make many, but when they come into oneness, they then make many. What do we learn from this? That great is the power of union. The wise counsel of God at the beginning divided the one into two; and being desirous of showing that even after division it still remained one, He didn't allow that the one should be of itself enough for procreation. For he is not one who is not yet united but the half of one. It is evident from this, that Adam begot no offspring in the Garden, as was the case also before time. Notice the mystery of marriage! He made of one, one; and having made Adam and Eve one, He so makes one, so that now also man is produced of one. For man and wife are not two men, but one Man. This may be confirmed from many sources; for instance, from James, from Mary the Mother of Christ, from the words, 'God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them' (Genesis 1:27). If he is the head, and she the body, how are they two?"

Chrysostom also stated⁴⁶ that the one Body is composed of the faithful past, present and future, and this is modeled after things in heaven. Some parts of the Body are principal members such as the head, where the body cannot live without it. Some parts of the body are more honorable than others and constitute a greater share; but all are formed and necessary.

"When Paul exhorts us to anything of special importance, so truly wise and spiritual as he is, he grounds his exhortation on things in Heaven; this was a lesson he had learned from the Lord. Thus he said, 'Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us' (Ephesians 5:2). Again, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God' (Philippians 2:5-6). This is what he is doing here also, for whenever the examples he is setting before us are great, he is intense in his zeal and feeling. What then does he say when he is inciting us to unity? 'There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism'" (Ephesians 4:4-5).

"Now what is this one body? The faithful throughout the whole world, those which are, which have been, and which shall be. Those who before Christ's coming pleased God are 'one body'. How so? Because they also knew Christ! Where does this appear? 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad' (John 8:56). Again, 'If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me' (John 5:46). The prophets too would not have written of One, where they didn't know what they said; in fact, they both knew Him, and worshipped Him. Thus they are also 'one body'".

"The body is not disjoined from the spirit, for then it would not be a body. Thus it is customary also with us, touching things which are united, and which have any great consistency or coherence, to say, they are one body. Again, touching union, we take that to be a body which is under one head. If there is one head, then there is one body. The body is composed of members both honorable and dishonorable. The greater is not to rise up against the lowest, nor the lowest

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, X, v. 5.

to envy the other. They do not all indeed contribute the same share, but severally according to the proportion of need. All are formed for necessary and for different purposes; all are of equal honor. Some are more especially principal members, others less so. For example, the head is more a principal member than all the rest of the body, as containing within itself all the senses, and the governing principle of the soul. To live without the head is impossible; whereas many persons have lived for a long time with their feet cut off. The head is better than the other members, not only by its position, but also by its vital energy and its function.”

Members of Christ

Paul said, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:4-5). Being one Body, there is a special relationship between all the members.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁴⁷ how the Lord’s Table fits in with us being members of Christ. The feeding of the 5000 was a warm-up; the real Mystery is how we become one body and members of His flesh and His bones. This is accomplished by the food He has freely given us to lead us to a closer friendship and to show His love for us.

“The Jewish leaders reacted to Jesus, ‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’ (John 6:52) If they seek to know the ‘how’, why didn’t they ask this in the matter of the loaves, how He extended five loaves to thousands of people? They only thought about being satisfied, not of seeing the miracle. ‘But’, said someone, ‘their experience then taught them’. Then by reason of that experience these words ought to have been readily received. To this end Jesus did that strange miracle that taught by it they might no longer disbelieve what should be said by Him afterwards.”

“Those men then reaped no fruit from what was said, but we have enjoyed the real benefit. Therefore it is necessary to understand the marvel of the Mysteries, what it is, why it was given, and what the profit of the action is. We become one Body, and ‘members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones’ (Ephesians 5:30). Let the initiated follow what I say. In order then that we may become this not by love only, but in very deed, let us be blended into that flesh. This is affected by the food which He has freely given us, desiring to show the love which He has for us. On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head. This belongs to those who love strongly; this, for instance, Job implied, speaking of his servants, by whom he was beloved so exceedingly, that they desired to cling to his flesh. For they said, to show the strong love which they felt, ‘He gives us his meat to satisfy us’ (Job 31:31). This also Christ has done, to lead us to a closer friendship, and to show His love for us; He has given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, eat Him, fix their teeth in His flesh, embrace Him, and satisfy all their love. Let us then

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

return from that Table like lions breathing fire, having become terrible to the devil; thinking about our Head, and on the love which He has shown for us.”

Chrysostom also stated⁴⁸ that for a body to be healthy, there must be lesser and greater members, but all should have the same care for one another as they do for themselves. The lesser should actually have more honors, since each person’s being depends on his neighbor’s safety. If we neglect the lesser, the wound passes on to everyone else, since everyone in the body is important.

“If we trample on those less fortunate, we injure ourselves; for when they are cut off, the whole body is destroyed. What else is a body than the existence of many members? Paul said, that ‘the body is not one member, but many’ (1 Corinthians 12:14). If this is the essence of a body, let us take care that the many continues to be many. Unless this is entirely preserved, there is a sword stroke in the vital parts; which is the reason why Paul does not require this only, them not being separated, but also them being closely united. Having said, ‘that there should be no schism in the body’, Paul was not content with this, but added, ‘that the members should have the same care one for another’ (1 Corinthians 12:25). He added this other cause also that the less fortunate should enjoy more honor. God has set it up this way not only so that they should not be separated one from another, but also that there may be abundant love and harmony. If each man’s being depends on his neighbor’s safety, we can’t even speak of the less fortunate and the more fortunate: in this case there is no more and less. The body will perish, unless the lesser parts also continue.”

“If even the greater members will perish when the less are broken off, the greater ought to care in like manner for the less as for themselves, inasmuch as in the safety of the lesser, the greater remain. If we say, ‘such a member is dishonored and inferior’, if we don’t provide for him just as we would for ourselves, if we neglect him as inferior, the injury will pass on to ourselves. Paul said not only, that ‘the members should care for one another’, but he added, ‘that they should have the same care one for another’; i.e., in like manner the small should enjoy the same providential care as the great.”

“Don’t say then, that such a one is an ordinary person, but consider he is a member of that body which holds together the whole; and as the eye, so also does he cause the body to be a body. For where the body is built up, there none has anything more than his neighbor. Neither is a body composed of one part greater and another less; but the body being many and diverse. Just as the greater helped to make up the body, so also the lesser helped. The comparative deficiency of the lesser, when the body is to be built up, turns out of equal value with the noble contributions. For example, let there be no member greater or less, nor more and less honorable, but let all be an eye or all be a head; will not the body perish? Everyone sees it! Again, if all are inferior, the same thing will happen. So that in this respect also the less are proved equal. If one must say something more, the purpose of the lesser being less is that the body may remain. The lesser is less, in order that some may continue to be great. And here is why Paul demands the

⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXI, 4.

same care for all, ‘if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*’” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Chrysostom also put things in perspective⁴⁹ on how the Body of Christ is different from life in the Old Testament. Christ brought His teaching from heaven that He might direct our thoughts there. We do this by looking to our neighbor for our own good. Our neighbor is our member and has the same Faith; if we neglect him, we neglect ourselves. What is our neighbor’s good is ours; we are one body and parts and limbs one of another.

“Since then we have been granted a larger and more perfect teaching, God having no longer spoken by the prophets, ‘has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*’ (Hebrews 1:1-2), let us show forth a conversation far higher than theirs, and suitable to the honor bestowed on us. Strange would it be that Christ should have so far lowered Himself, as to choose to speak to us no longer by His servants, but by His own mouth, and yet we should show forth nothing more than those of old. They had Moses for their teacher; we, Moses’ Lord. Let us then exhibit a heavenly wisdom worthy of this honor, and let us have nothing to do with earth. It was for this that He brought His teaching from heaven, that He might direct our thoughts there that we might be imitators of our Teacher according to our ability. But how may we become imitators of Christ? By acting in everything for the common good, and not merely seeking our own. ‘For even Christ’, said Paul, ‘did not please Himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me’ (Romans 15:3; Psalm 69:9). Let no one therefore seek just his own good. A man really seeks his own good when he looks to that of his neighbor. What is their good is ours; we are one body and parts and limbs one of another. Let us not then be as though we were torn apart. Let no one say, ‘such a person is no friend of mine; he’s not a relation, nor neighbor; I have nothing to do with him; how shall I approach him, how shall I address him?’ Though he is neither relation nor friend, yet he is a man, who shares the same nature as us, owns the same Lord, is our fellow-servant, and fellow-sojourner, for he is born in the same world. If besides he partakes of the same faith, he has also become our member: for what friendship could work such union, as the relationship of faith? Our closeness one with another must not be such nearness only as friends ought to show to friends, but such as is between limb and limb; no man can possibly discover any closeness greater than this sort of friendship and fellowship. We cannot say, ‘Where does my closeness and connection with this limb come from?’ That would be ridiculous. So neither can we say so in the case of our brother. ‘We were all baptized into one body’ (1 Corinthians 12:13), said Paul. Why into one body? That we might not be torn apart, but preserve the just proportions of that one body by our interchange and friendship one with another. Let us not then despise one another, lest we are neglectful of ourselves. ‘For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church’ (Ephesians 5:29). Therefore God has given to us just one habitation, this earth; He has distributed all things equally; He has lighted one sun for us all; He has spread above us one roof, the sky; He made one table, the earth, bear food for us. Another table has He given

⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 3.

far better than this, yet that too is one, (those who share our mysteries understand my words). One manner of birth He has bestowed on all, the spiritual; we all have one country, that in the heavens; of the same cup we all drink.”

Ambrose of Milan pointed out⁵⁰ how serious the problems in the body are if one member tries to take over the function of another, like the eye trying to serve as a mouth. We handcuff the whole man! A similar thing happens when we try to deprive someone when we ought to suffer with him. If the whole body is injured in one member, so also is the whole community of the human race disturbed in one man; Christ the Lord will grieve that the price of His blood was paid in vain.

“Can one limb claim the duties of another? Can the eye claim for itself the duties of the ear; or the mouth the duties of the eye; or the hand the service of the feet; or the feet that of the hands? No; the hands themselves, both left and right, have different duties to do, so that if one were to change the use of either, one would have difficulty. We would handcuff the whole man if we changed the service of the various members. For instance, if we were to try to take food with the left hand, or to perform the duties of the left hand with the right; we might be able to do this in a clumsy fashion if need demanded it.”

“Imagine for a moment, and give to the eye the power to withdraw the understanding from the head, the sense of hearing from the ears, the power of thought from the mind, the sense of smell from the nose, the sense of taste from the mouth, and then to assume them itself; would it not destroy the whole order of nature? Paul says it well, ‘If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?’ (1 Corinthians 12:17) So, then, we are all one body, though with many members, all necessary to the body. For no one member can say of another, ‘I have no need of you’ (1 Corinthians 12:21). Those members which seem to be feebler are much more necessary and require greater care and attention. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

“We see how grave a matter it is to deprive another, with whom we ought rather to suffer, or to act unfairly or injuriously towards one to whom we ought to give a share in our services. This is a true law of nature, which binds us to show kindness, so that we should all in turn help one another, as parts of one body, and should never think of depriving another of anything, seeing it is against the law of nature to abstain from giving help. We are born in such a way that limb combines with limb, and one works with another, and all assist each other in mutual service. If one fails in its duty, the rest are hindered. If the hand tears out the eye, has it not hindered the use of its work? If the hand were to wound the foot, the body couldn’t move. How much worse is it for the whole man to be drawn aside from his duty than for one of the members only! If the whole body is injured in one member, so also is the whole community of the human race disturbed in one man. The nature of mankind is injured, as also is the society of the holy Church, which rises into one united body, bound together in oneness of faith and love. Christ the

⁵⁰ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, III, iii, 17-19.

Lord, also, Who died for all, will grieve that the price of His blood was paid in vain.”

Gregory the Great pointed out⁵¹ how mutually beneficial the members of the body are to each other. Just as the foot sees by the eye and the tongue concurs with the ears for their benefit, so what we love in others becomes ours in the body even though we cannot do what they do.

“The good things of others, which they cannot have, they might make their own, if they loved others. All are constituted together in faith as are many members in one body; which are indeed diverse as to their office, but in mutually agreeing with each other are made one. Thus the foot sees by the eye, and the eyes walk by the feet; the hearing of the ears serves the mouth, and the tongue of the mouth concurs with the ears for their benefit; the belly supports the hands, and the hands work for the belly. In the arrangement of the body, therefore, we learn what we should observe in our conduct. It is, then, too shameful not to live up to what we are. Those things, in fact, are ours which we love in others, even though we cannot follow them; and what things are loved in us become theirs that love them.”

John Chrysostom stated⁵² that the issue of the oneness of the members of Christ becomes critical in the case of fornication. When a man who is a member of Christ has sex with a harlot, he joins the harlot to Christ. This merits everlasting punishment; Chrysostom recommended that a man in this condition not come to Church, just like a diseased sheep is separated from the herd.

“Paul said, ‘If any faithful woman has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him’ (1 Corinthians 7:13). Not so concerning a harlot! ‘Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery’ (Matthew 5:32). If the coming together makes one body, he who comes together with a harlot definitely becomes one body with her. How then shall the modest woman, being a member of Christ, receive someone like that, or how shall she join herself to the member of an harlot (i.e. to her husband). Notice the excess of fornication over idolatry. The woman who dwells with an unbeliever is not impure; ‘for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife’ (1 Corinthians 7:14). Not so with the harlot; but what? ‘Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot?’ (1 Corinthians 6:15) In the one case sanctification remains, and is not removed though the unbeliever dwells with his wife; but in the other case sanctification departs. A dreadful thing is fornication, and an agent for everlasting punishment; even in this world it brings with it ten thousand woes. The man so guilty is forced to lead a life of anxiety and toil; he is no better off than those who are under punishment, creeping into another man’s house with fear and trembling, suspecting all alike both slave and free. Therefore I exhort you to be freed from this malady, and if you don’t obey, don’t come to Church. Sheep that are covered with the scab, and full of disease, may not come near those that are healthy; we must drive them from the fold until they get rid of the disease. We have been made members of Christ; let us not, I entreat, become members of a harlot. This

⁵¹ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 10.

⁵² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIII, 4.

place is not a brothel but a Church; if then you have the members of a harlot, don't stand in the Church, lest you insult the place.”

The Gifts of God

Paul said, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. ⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy” (Romans 12:6-9).

There are (at least) two aspects of the gifts of God: those we give to God and those we have received from God. Chief among those that we give to God are the fruit of the earth that we offer in the Eucharist. Those that we receive from God at our baptism may take many years for us to recognize as such. If we choose to depart from the Faith, we may never recognize the gifts He has given.

Gifts We Give to God

God stands in need of nothing from us; but He appreciates gifts that we offer out of a thankful heart. The fruit of our lips is something that everyone can and should offer all the time (Hebrews 13:15). Other fruit of the Spirit that we offer to God are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Galatians 5:22) as well as righteousness, and truth (Ephesians 5:9). This fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:18). But there are other gifts we give to God all the time:

Irenaeus of Lyons spoke⁵³ of the gifts that we bring to God: the Eucharistic gifts of the Lord's Table. The Church alone can do this; Jews cannot do this because they have not received the Word; heretics try, but they sin against their Father and insult Him rather than give thanks.

“The Church offers her gift with single-mindedness, and her gift is justly reckoned a pure sacrifice with God. As Paul says, ‘I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God’ (Philippians 4:18). We need to offer an oblation to God, and in all things to be found grateful to God our Maker, in a pure mind, and in faith without hypocrisy, in well-grounded hope, in fervent love, offering the first-fruits of His own created things. The Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, offering to Him, with giving of thanks, the things taken from His creation. But the Jews do not offer thus; for their hands are full of blood; they have not received the Word, through whom it is offered to God. None of the *synagogues* of the heretics offer this either. Some, by maintaining that the Father is different from the Creator, when they offer to Him what belongs to this creation of ours, set Him forth as being covetous of another's property, and desirous of what is not His own. Those who maintain that the things around us originated from apostasy, ignorance and passion, while offering to Him the fruits of ignorance and passion, sin against their Father, rather subjecting Him to insult

⁵³ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xviii, 4.

than giving Him thanks. How can they be consistent with themselves, when they say that the bread over which thanks has been given is the body of their Lord, and the cup is His blood? If they do not call Him the Son of the Creator of the world, that is, His Word, they are hypocritical when they attribute to Him the trees bearing fruit, the fountains gushing forth, and the earth giving its produce (Mark 4:28-29).”

Jerome wrote⁵⁴ to Julian, a wealthy nobleman, who had just lost his wife and daughters, to encourage him to abandon his wealth and become a monk. Jerome compared Julian to the widow who put two mites into the treasury – everything she had – in offering a gift to God. This kind of offering is acceptable.

“You despise money; yet the world’s philosophers have done the same. One⁵⁵ of these -- to say nothing of the rest -- cast the price of many possessions into the sea, saying as he did so, ‘To the bottom with you, you provokers of evil lusts. I shall drown you in the sea that you may never drown me in sin’. If then a philosopher -- a creature of vanity whom popular applause can buy and sell -- laid down all his burden at once, how can you think that you have reached virtue’s crowning height when you have yielded up but a portion of yours? It is you yourself that the Lord wishes, ‘a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God’ (Romans 12:1). Yourself, I say, and not what you have. And therefore, as he trained Israel by subjecting it to many plagues and afflictions, so does He now admonish you by sending you trials of different kinds. ‘For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives’ (Hebrews 12:6). The poor widow did but cast two mites into the treasury; yet because she cast in all that she had it is said of her that she surpassed all the rich in offering gifts to God (Mark 12:43-44). Such gifts are valued not by their weight but by the good-will with which they are made. You may have spent your substance upon numbers of people, and a portion of your friends may have reason to rejoice in your bounty; yet those who have received nothing at your hands are still more numerous. Neither the wealth of Darius⁵⁶ nor the riches of Croesus⁵⁷ would suffice to satisfy the wants of the world’s poor. But if you once give yourself to the Lord and resolve to follow the Savior in the perfection of apostolic virtue, then you will come to see what your place has hitherto been, and how you have lagged in the rear of the followers of Christ.”

Spiritual Gifts from God

Paul wrote to the Corinthians at length about spiritual gifts and to the Romans also as a reminder. These gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for use in the Church, and more gifts are available for those who are able to use them effectively.

⁵⁴ Jerome, *Letters*, CXVIII, 5.

⁵⁵ That is, Crates the Theban.

⁵⁶ Probably Darius the Great of Persia, c. 550–486 BC

⁵⁷ Croesus was [king of Lydia](#) from 560 to 547 BC until his defeat by the [Persians](#). His name was proverbial for a very wealthy man.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁵⁸ that Paul, like Jesus, taught us humility and sacrifice as a beginning of our walk with God. Having spiritual gifts had made the Corinthians unduly proud; Paul pointed out the cause of this disease by concentrating on humility. If everything they had was a gift of God, what is there to be proud of?

“When Jesus went up on a mountain to teach, He took this for his beginning, and made this the foundation, in the words, ‘Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 5:3). Paul too, as he passed from the doctrinal parts to those of a more practical kind, has taught us virtue in general terms, by requiring of us the admirable sacrifice. Being on the point of giving a more particular portrait of it, he begins from lowliness of mind as from the head, and tells us, ‘I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think’ (Romans 12:3), for this is His will, ‘but to think soberly’. What he means is this. We have received wisdom not that we should use it to make us haughty, but to make us sober-minded. Paul does not say for us to be lowly in mind, but that we might have sobriety, meaning by sobriety here not that virtue which contrasts with lewdness, nor the being free from intemperance, but being sober and healthful in mind. The Greek name of it means keeping the mind safe.”

“To show that he who is not modest like this, cannot be sober either, that is, cannot be staid and healthful minded (because such a one is bewildered, out of his wits, and is more crazed than any madman), he calls lowliness of mind, soberness of mind. ‘According as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith’ (Romans 12:3). Since having gifts given them had made many unreasonably elated, both with these and with the Corinthians, notice how he lays open the cause of the disease, and gradually removes it. For after saying that we should think soberly, he proceeds, ‘according as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith’, meaning here the gift by faith. By using the word ‘dealt’, he comforts him who had the less, and humbles him who had the greater share. If God dealt it, and it is no achievement of ours, why think highly of yourself? But if anyone says that faith here does not mean the gift, this would only the more show that he was humbling the vain boasters. If that which is the cause of the gift, that faith by which miracles are wrought, is itself from God, on what ground do we think highly of ourselves? If He had not come, or been incarnate, then the things of faith would not have fared well either. It is from this that all the good things take their rise. But if it is He that gives it, He knows how He deals it. He made everything, and takes like care of everything. As His giving came out of His love towards man, so does the quantity which He gives. Was He Who had shown His goodness in regard to the main point, which is the giving of the gift, likely to neglect us in regard to the measure of the gift?”

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁹ that being prideful about spiritual gifts makes no sense since all members are part of the same body. Further, he pointed out that Paul stated that gifts are granted according to our measure of faith. Thus if we have fewer gifts than someone else, it’s our own

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XX, v. 3.

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXI, vv. 4-5.

fault since we have less faith. And the Person Who gave the gifts (the Holy Spirit) is the One Who knows who can use the gifts and who can contain more.

“To correct this disease of haughtiness, Paul asked ‘Why do you think highly of yourself?’ Or why again does another utterly despise himself? Are we not all one body, both great and small? When we are members one of another, why do you by your haughtiness separate yourself? Why do you put your brother to shame? As he is a member of you, so are you also of him. It is on this score that your claims to honor are equal. Paul has stated two things that might take down their haughty spirit: one that we are members one of another, not the small of the great only, but also the great of the small; and another, that we are all one body. Or rather there are three points, since he shows that the gift was one of grace. ‘Therefore don’t be high-minded’ (Romans 12:3). For it was given you of God; you didn’t take it, or even find it. When he touches on the gifts, he does not say that one received more, and another less, but what? Different! His words are, ‘having then gifts’, not less and greater, but, ‘differing’. If you are not appointed to the same office, still the body is the same. Beginning with gifts, and after mentioning prophecy, and ministry, and the like, he concludes with mercy, diligence and help. Since then it was likely that some would be virtuous, yet not have prophecy, he shows that this too is a gift, and a much greater one than the other (1 Corinthians 12:28-31). For the whole is matter of gift and grace.”

“Since then he had sufficiently comforted them, he wished also to make them compete with each other, and labor more in earnest, by showing that it is themselves that give the grounds for their receiving more or less. It is given by God ‘according as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith’ (Romans 12:3); and again, ‘according to the grace that is given to us’ (Romans 12:6), that he may subdue the haughty. But he says also that the beginnings lie with themselves, to rouse the listless. When Paul said, ‘earnestly desire the best gifts’, (1 Corinthians 12:31), he shows that they were themselves the cause of the differences in what was given. When he says, ‘But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills’ (1 Corinthians 12:11), he is proving that those who have received it ought not to be elated, so using every way open to him to ease their disorder. To rouse those who have fallen drowsy, he says, ‘If prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith’ (Romans 12:6). Though it is a grace, yet it is not poured forth at random, but framing its measure according to the recipients, it lets as much flow as it may find the vessel of faith that is brought to be capable of.”

Basil the Great wrote⁶⁰ about how the Holy Spirit works in the Body of Christ according to the gifts that He has given. There is extraordinary harmony, and it resembles the reasoning we experience in our soul. The Holy Spirit is frequently spoken of as the place where we are being sanctified, where we worship in spirit and truth and where we see God.

“Like reason in the soul, which is at one time the thought in the heart, and at another speech uttered by the tongue, so is the Holy Spirit, as when ‘The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (Romans 8:16). This is also true when He ‘cries in our hearts, Abba, Father’ (Galatians 6:4), or

⁶⁰ Basil the Great, On the Spirit, XXVI, 61-62.

when He speaks on our behalf, as it is said, ‘It not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you’ (Matthew 10:20). Again, the Spirit is conceived of, in relation to the distribution of gifts, as a whole in parts. For we all are ‘individually members of one another, having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us’ (Romans 12:5-6). Wherefore ‘the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you’ (1 Corinthians 12:21), but all together complete the Body of Christ in the Unity of the Spirit, and render to one another the needful aid that comes of the gifts. ‘But God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased’ (1 Corinthians 12:18). But ‘the members should have the same care for one another’ (1 Corinthians 12:25), according to the inborn spiritual communion of their sympathy. Therefore, ‘if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*’ (1 Corinthians 12:26). As parts in the whole, we are individually in the Spirit, because ‘by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

“It is an extraordinary statement, but it is none the less true, that the Spirit is frequently spoken of as the *place* of those that are being sanctified, and it will become evident that even by this figure the Spirit, so far from being degraded, is rather glorified. For words applicable to the body are, for the sake of clearness, frequently transferred in Scripture to spiritual conceptions. Accordingly we find the Psalmist, even in reference to God, saying, ‘Be to me a protecting God, and a stronghold to save me: for You are my fortress and my refuge’ (Psalm 71:3 LXX) and concerning the Spirit ‘Behold, *there is* a place by me: you shall stand upon the rock’ (Exodus 33:21 LXX). Plainly meaning the place or contemplation in the Spirit wherein, after Moses had entered therein, he was able to see God intelligibly manifested to him. This is the special and peculiar place of true worship; for it is said, ‘Take heed to yourself that you offer not your whole-burnt-offerings in any place which you shalt see; only in the place which the Lord your God shall choose’ (Deuteronomy 12:13-14). Now what is a spiritual burnt offering? ‘Offer to God the sacrifice of praise; and pay your vows to the Most High’ (Psalm 50:14 LXX). And in what place do we offer it? In the Holy Spirit! Where have we learned this? From the Lord himself in the words ‘The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him’ (John 4:23). This place Jacob saw and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know *it*’ (Genesis 28:16). It follows that the Spirit is truly the place of the saints and the saint is the proper place for the Spirit, offering himself as he does for the indwelling of God, and called God’s Temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). So Paul speaks in Christ, saying ‘We speak in the sight of God in Christ’ (2 Corinthians 2:17), and Christ in Paul, as he himself says, ‘Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me’ (2 Corinthians 13:3). So also in the Spirit Paul speaks mysteries, and again the Spirit speaks in him.”

Brotherly Love

Paul said, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans

12:10-11). We note that Paul does not say at all that it's OK to just barely tolerate each other and keep smiling. The brotherly love Paul is talking about is much more than that! It's easy to miss in Paul's words his admonition for humility (giving preference to one another) as an associate of brotherly love. Also associated with brotherly love is the attitude that we are strangers and travelers in this life, looking for our true homeland at the Second Coming of Christ.

John Chrysostom noted⁶¹ what Paul really said about brotherly love, and raised the bar on what we should be doing. Moses felt the same way, but was not able to implement what Paul spoke of. Our love for one another in the Church should be "kindly affectionate to one another" and "give preference to one another in honor" (Romans 12:10), not just barely tolerating each other. This doesn't mean just hanging back and waiting for an opportunity, but being zealous, going well out of our way and being fervent in spirit (Romans 12:11). Some show love just in the mind, but never reach out their hand to anyone; Paul rejects this as being lukewarm.

"Paul stated, 'Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love' (Romans 12:10). You are brethren, he means, and have come from the same birth pangs that produced the Church. From this fact alone you ought to love one another. This Moses said to those who were quarrelling in Egypt, 'You are brethren, why do you strike your neighbor?' (Exodus 2:13 LXX) When Paul is speaking of those outside the Church, he says, 'If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men' (Romans 12:18). But when he is speaking of those within the Church, he says, 'Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love'. In the other case he requires abstinence from quarrelling, hatred and feelings of repugnance; but here loving too, and not merely loving, but loving like relatives do. Not only must one's 'love be without hypocrisy', but intense, warm and glowing also. To what purpose could you love without fraud, and not love with warmth? Whence he says, 'be kindly affectionate to one another', that is, be friends, and warm ones too. Do not wait to be loved by another, but leap at it yourself, and be the first to begin it. We will reap the wages of his love by doing so. Having mentioned the reason then why we ought to love one another, he tells us also the way in which the affection may grow unchangeable. Paul proceeds to say, 'In honor giving preference to one another' (Romans 12:10). This is the way that affection is produced; when affection is produced this way, it stays. There is nothing that makes friends so much, as the earnest endeavor to overcome one's neighbor in honoring him."

"Paul also stated that we should be 'not lagging in diligence' (Romans 12:11). This also generates love when we show a readiness to protect with honor; there is nothing that makes men beloved so much as honor and forethought. To love is not enough, but there must be this also; or rather this comes from loving, as also loving has its warmth from this, and they confirm each other. There are many that love in mind, yet don't reach out the hand to anyone. This is why Paul uses every means to build up love. But how are we to avoid 'lagging in diligence?' By becoming 'Fervent in spirit'! (Romans 12:11). Notice how in every instance Paul aims at higher degrees. He does not say 'give' only, but 'with liberality'; not just 'lead', but do it 'with diligence'; not just 'show mercy', but do it 'with cheerfulness' (Romans 12:8). Paul continues to say that we should not

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXI, vv. 9-11.

just show ‘honor’, but ‘give preference to one another’; not just ‘love’, but do it ‘without hypocrisy’; not just refrain from ‘evil’ things, but ‘abhor’ them; not just hold to ‘what is good’, but ‘cling’ to it; not just ‘love’, but to be ‘kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love’ (Romans 12:9-10). We should not just be zealous, but have no ‘lagging in diligence’; we should not just have the ‘Spirit’, but have it ‘fervently’ (Romans 12:11); that is, that we may be warm and awakened. If we have these things, we will draw the Spirit to us. If this abides with us, it will likewise make us good for those purposes; all things will be easy from the Spirit and the love, while we are made to glow from both sides.”

Chrysostom also pointed out⁶² Abraham, the widow of Zarephath, and the Shunammite widow as examples to imitate, and who received substantial rewards for their faith. On the other hand, we are reluctant to give anything to anyone we don’t know. We tend to overlook the Lord’s words, “Inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me” (Matthew 25:40). As the Lord said this, He described what Judgment Day would be like, and how the rewards for those who gave to the poor will be tremendous.

“Paul does not say just give to the poor, but ‘share with the needs of the saints’ to show that the givers receive more than they give, because it is a community. The givers bring money; the poor bring us in boldness toward God. Paul did not say just be hospitable, but ‘given’ to it, to instruct us not to wait for those that shall ask, and see when they will come to us, but to run to them, and be given to finding them.”

“This Abraham did. He spent the whole day waiting for a good opportunity, and when he saw it, leaped on it, ran to meet them, worshipped on the ground, and said, ‘My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant’ (Genesis 18:1-8). If we happen to see a poor man, we don’t even to speak to him. After him begging thousands of times we may be softened and ask our servant to give them a trifle; we think we have quite done our duty. Not with Abraham! He assumed the position of a servant, though he did not know who he was going to take under his roof. But we, who have clear information that it is Christ Whom we take in, do not grow gentle even for this. Abraham beseeches and falls on his knees to them, yet we insult those that come to us. Abraham did everything by himself and his wife, whereas we don’t even do it by our servants. Notice the bounteous table that Abraham set before them; the bounteousness came not from excess of wealth, but from the riches of a ready will. There were many rich persons there; still none did anything of this kind. How many widows were there in Israel? Yet none showed hospitality to Elijah (1 Kings 17:9-16). How many wealthy persons were there in Elisha’s day? But the Shunammite woman alone gathered in the fruits of hospitality (2 Kings 4:8-37). Besides Abraham’s largeness and ready mind it is especially important to admire that when he had no knowledge who they were that had come, yet he so acted. Let us not be curious either; since for Christ you do receive the poor man. If we are always so picky, many a time we will pass by a man of esteem, and lose our reward from him. Yet he that receives one that is not of esteem, has no fault found with him, but is even rewarded. ‘He who receives a prophet in the name of

⁶² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXI, v. 13.

a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward' (Matthew 10:41). But he who out of this ill-timed pickiness passes one that should be admired, shall even suffer punishment. We should not busy ourselves with men's lives and doings. This is a very extreme form of stinginess: for one loaf of bread, needing to know exactly about a man's entire life."

John Cassian recorded⁶³ the Desert Fathers as saying that true brotherly love begins with humility and how we think of ourselves. If we submit our thoughts to our elders, we are less likely to be led away by demons disguised as angels of light. True humility regards the judgment of others as more important than our own.

"It has often been proven that what Paul said really took place. 'For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11:14), so that he deceitfully sheds abroad a confusing and foul obscuration of the thoughts instead of the true light of knowledge. Our thoughts should be received in a humble and gentle heart, and kept for the consideration of some more experienced brother or approved elder. After they have been thoroughly sifted by their judgment, we can either reject them or admit them; otherwise we shall be sure to venerate in our thoughts an angel of darkness instead of an angel of light, and be struck with a grievous destruction. This is an injury which it is impossible for anyone to avoid who trusts in his own judgment, unless he becomes a lover and follower of true humility and with all contrition of heart fulfills what Paul chiefly prays for: 'If there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself' (Philippians 2:1-3). Paul repeated this: 'Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another' (Romans 12:10). We should each think more of the knowledge and holiness of our partner, and hold that the better part of true discretion is to be commended in the judgment of another rather than in our own."

John Chrysostom pointed out⁶⁴ how some people were so filled with brotherly love and hospitality that they had the honor to entertain angels without knowing it.

"Paul said, 'Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels' (Hebrews 13:1-2). Notice how he commands them to preserve what they had; he does not add other things. He did not say, 'Be loving as brethren', but, 'Let brotherly love continue'. Again, he did not say, 'Be hospitable', as if they were not, but, 'Don't forget hospitality', for this was likely to happen owing to their afflictions."

"Therefore Paul says 'some have unwittingly entertained angels'. Notice how great was the honor, how great the gain! What Paul means by 'unwittingly' is that they entertained angels without knowing it. Therefore the reward also was great, because he entertained them, not knowing that they were Angels. If he had known it, it would have been nothing wonderful."

⁶³ John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Joseph, XVI, 11.

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXXIII, 1.

Chrysostom also encouraged⁶⁵ prayers before and after meals to promote brotherly love in the Churches. This practice introduces us to the manners of angels and focuses us on thanksgiving and the bounty of God's grace. Worldly care is cast out and we become inclined to share God's bounty with others.

“When praying before meals, let us introduce the manners and laws of the angels into our houses. Let us hear this spiritual melody, and let everyone after his meal say these words, ‘And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).

“Next, the thanksgiving should take place not for that one day only, but for all our life. For Jacob said, ‘The God in whose sight my fathers were well pleasing, *even* Abram and Isaac, the God who continues to feed me from my youth until this day’ (Genesis 48:15 LXX). A lesson of self-command is drawn from this, that when God feeds, we must not take thought. If a king promised you to furnish your daily food out of his own stores, you would be of good hope for the future. Much more, when God gives, and all things pour upon you as out of fountains, shouldn't we be freed from all anxiety? Yes, and to this very intent the Apostles so speak, that they may persuade both themselves and those that are made disciples by them, to put off all worldly care. Then, not to have us suppose that for themselves only they offer up this thanksgiving, they further⁶⁶ say, ‘Who gives food to all flesh’ (Psalm 136:25 LXX), giving thanks in behalf of all the world. As fathers of the whole earth, so do they offer up their praises for all, and train themselves to a sincere brotherly love. For it is not even possible they should hate them, in behalf of whom they thank God, that they are fed.”

“Notice both the love introduced by their thanksgiving, and worldly care cast out. For if He feeds all flesh, much more will He feed those that are devoted to him; if He feeds those that are entangled in worldly cares, much more will He feed those that are freed from the same. To establish this, Christ Himself said, ‘You are of more value than many sparrows’ (Luke 12:7) And He said it, teaching them not to put their confidence in wealth, land and seeds; for it is not these that feed us, but the word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4)”

Fervent in Spirit

Paul said, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer” (Romans 12:10-12).

Athanasius of Alexandria pointed out⁶⁷ from the Scriptures that being fervent in spirit means having a godly fire. We are to become like God, who is spirit. Moses was like this and walked up into the cloud and the fire on Mt. Sinai, and descended purified. Paul advised, “Don't quench the Spirit!” The unthankful quench and persecute the Spirit; but the Spirit just departs

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LV, 7.

⁶⁶ Psalm 136 is a prayer that was addressed to God by the priest, and the people responded to each verse, such as, “Who gives food to all flesh” with the words, “For His mercy endures forever”.

⁶⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, III, 4.

from such people. Jeremiah had this fire, and had to depart from those who loved wickedness. Paul had this fire, but couldn't even talk about it to people. The Lord Jesus came in order to ignite this fire. Judas and the nine lepers who Jesus healed didn't have this fire; their reward will be the last fire reserved for the devil and his angels.

“The God of all, ‘Who makes His angels spirits’ is a spirit, ‘and His ministers a flame of fire’ (Psalm 104:4). Therefore, in the Exodus from Egypt, He forbade the multitude to touch the mountain, where God was appointing them the Law, because they were not of this character. But He called blessed Moses to it, as being fervent in spirit, and possessing unquenchable grace, saying, ‘Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but the people shall not come near; nor shall the people go up (the mountain) with him’ (Exodus 24:2). Moses entered into the cloud also, and when the mountain was smoking, he was not injured; but rather through ‘The words of the Lord *are* pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times’ (Psalm 12:6), Moses descended purified. Paul when desirous that the grace of the Spirit given to us should not grow cold, exhorts, ‘Do not quench the Spirit’ (1 Thessalonians 5:19). So shall we remain partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to the end the Spirit given at the beginning. Paul said, ‘Quench not’; not because the Spirit is placed in the power of men, and is able to suffer anything from them; but because bad and unthankful men are such as wish to quench it, since they, like the impure, persecute the Spirit with unholy deeds. ‘For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit, and will rise and depart from foolish thoughts, and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness’ (Wisdom 1:5 RSV). Now they being without understanding, deceitful, and lovers of sin, walk still as in darkness, not having ‘the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world’ (John 1:9). A fire such as this laid hold of Jeremiah, when the word was in him as a fire; he said, ‘I will by no means name the Name of the Lord, and I will no more at all speak in his name. It was a burning fire flaming in my bones. I am utterly weakened on all sides, and cannot bear *it*’ (Jeremiah 20:9 LXX). Our Lord Jesus Christ, being good and a lover of men, came that He might cast this fire on earth, ‘I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!’ (Luke 12:49) For He desired the repentance of a man rather than his death (Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11); so that evil should be entirely consumed in all men, that the soul, being purified, might be able to bring forth fruit; for the word which is sown by Him will be productive, ‘those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred’ (Mark 4:20). Thus, for instance, those who were with Cleopas (Luke 24:17-18), although infirm at first from lack of knowledge, yet afterwards were inflamed with the words of the Savior ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us? (Luke 24:32), and brought forth the fruits of the knowledge of Him. Paul, when seized by this fire, revealed it not to flesh and blood. Paul was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4), but having experienced the grace, he became a preacher of the Word. Not such were those nine lepers who were cleansed from their leprosy, and yet were unthankful to the Lord who healed them. Similarly Judas obtained the lot of an apostle, and was named a disciple of the Lord; but,

‘while eating bread with the Savior, lifted up his heel against Him, and became a traitor’ (Psalm 41:9, John 13:18). Such men have the due reward of their folly, since their expectation will be vain through their ingratitude. There is no hope for the ungrateful; the last fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), awaits those who have neglected divine light.”

Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁶⁸ that those who are fervent in spirit have distinguishing characteristics related to godliness. Their entire focus is on the things of God. The demons try to break the ranks of the saints and cause divisions, but the fervent in spirit trust in the Lord to fight for them. Because they stand on apostolic words, they stand against what befalls them and are well-pleasing to God.

“The righteous and faithful servants of the Lord are made disciples for the kingdom of heaven, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things* new and old’ (Matthew 13:52); and meditate on the words of the Lord, ‘when sitting in the house, when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up’ (Deuteronomy 6:7). They are of good hope because of the promise of the Spirit which said, ‘Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the Law of the LORD, and in His Law he meditates day and night’ (Psalm 1:1-2). Being grounded in, faith, rejoicing in hope, fervent in spirit, they have boldness to say, ‘My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart *shall give* understanding’ (Psalm 49:3). They can also say, ‘I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands’ (Psalm 143:5). And, ‘When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the *night* watches’ (Psalm 63:6). Afterwards, advancing in boldness, they say, ‘Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight’ (Psalm 19:14). What is the end of such a one? David cites immediately, ‘O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer’ (Psalm 19:14). For to those who thus examine themselves, and conform their hearts to the Lord, nothing adverse shall happen; for indeed, their heart is strengthened by confidence in the Lord, as it is written, ‘They that trust in the Lord *shall be* as mount Zion: he that dwells in Jerusalem shall never be moved.’ (Psalm 125:1 LXX). For if at any time, the crafty one shall be presumptuously bold against them, chiefly that he may break the rank of the saints, and cause a division among brethren; even in this the Lord is with them, not only as an avenger on their behalf, but also when they have already been beaten, as a deliverer for them. For this is the divine promise, ‘The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace’ (Exodus 14:14 LXX). Henceforth, although afflictions and trials from without overtake them, yet, being fashioned after the apostolic words, and ‘rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer’ (Romans 12:12) and in meditation on the Law, they stand against those things which befall them, are well-pleasing to God, and give utterance to the words which are written, ‘Afflictions and distresses found me: *but* thy commandments *were* my meditation”’ (Psalm 119:143).

⁶⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, XI, 6.

Weep with Those Who Weep

Paul said, “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, continue steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:12-15).

There is more depth in Paul’s words than might be apparent from a casual reading. Everything Paul said seems to be directed toward helping those in need, and being patient in tribulation, when our goods are confiscated by those who war against Christianity, except for the statement, “Rejoice with those who rejoice”.

Weeping with folks who are hurting is difficult; it takes time and it takes the right person who is able to console the one in need. Rejoicing with someone who is rejoicing is easy, but there is a hazard involved. If we become envious of the honor shown to the person who is rejoicing, the tyranny of a grudging spirit causes us to fight against God. We can become like Cain fighting against Abel. If we had true love for our neighbor, we would take everything that happens to our neighbor as if it were our own as we rejoice with him. This is important, and it points to a deeper aspect that Paul is driving at.

John Chrysostom noted⁶⁹ that it is hard to weep with those who weep and to stand by those in difficulty; but yet it is easy to rejoice with those who rejoice. However, many people can’t rejoice with others when others are honored, out of jealousy. The tyranny of a grudging spirit is hard to overcome; yet we must do so or we end up fighting against God.

“Love is not bare words, or mere ways of speaking to men, but a taking care of them, and a putting forth of itself by works; for example, relieving poverty, lending one’s aid to the sick, rescuing from dangers, standing by those that are in difficulties; to ‘Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep’ (Romans 12:15). Even rejoicing with someone is a part of love. Yet it seems a little thing, to be rejoicing with those that rejoice; nevertheless it is exceedingly great, and requires the spirit of true wisdom. We may find many that perform the more irksome part, and yet lack vigor for this. Many weep with those that weep, but still do not rejoice with those that rejoice, but are in tears when others rejoice; this comes from grudging and envy. The good deed of rejoicing when our brother rejoices is no small one, but even greater than the other. Not only is it greater than weeping with those that weep, but even greater than standing by those that are in danger. There are many that have shared danger with men in danger, but were cut to the heart when their friend came into honor. So great is the tyranny of a grudging spirit! Yet the weeping is a thing of toils and labors, and the rejoicing is one of choice and temper only. Yet at the same time many that have endured the harder task have not accomplished the easier one, but pine away when they see others in honor, when a whole Church is benefited, by doctrine, or in any other fashion. What can be worse than this? Such a one does not fight with his brother, but he fights with the will of God. Consider this, and

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, v. 31.

get rid of the disease; even if we are unwilling to set our neighbor free, at least let us set ourselves free from these countless evils.”

Chrysostom also pointed out⁷⁰ how bad envy of our brothers is; it causes us to become like Cain against Abel; it is worse than adultery; and it is difficult to cure. On the other hand, if we truly can rejoice with those who rejoice and avoid envying the one who is rejoicing, we become sharers in his crown.

“If we are commanded to love our enemies, what punishment shall we suffer if we hate even our friends? And if he who loves those that love him will be in no better a state than the heathen, what excuse shall he have who injures those that have done him no wrong? Listen to Paul, ‘Though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned⁷¹, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3). Now it is clear to everyone that where envy and malice are, there love is absent. This feeling is worse than fornication and adultery, for these go no farther than him who does them, but the tyranny of envy has overturned entire Churches, and has destroyed the whole world. Envy is the mother of murder. Through this Cain slew Abel his brother; through this Esau (would have slain) Jacob; through this Joseph’s brethren would have slain Joseph; through this the demons would have slain all mankind. Even though we may not kill now, we do many things worse than murder, laying snares for him on all sides, paralyzing his labors on the side of virtue, grieving that he pleases the Master of the world. We don’t war with our brother, but with Him whom he serves; Him we insult when we prefer our glory to His. What is worst of all is that this sin seems to be an unimportant one; in fact it is more grievous than any other. Though we show mercy, watch and fast, we are more accursed than any if we envy our brother. A man of the Corinthians was once guilty of adultery, yet he was charged with his sin and soon restored to righteousness. Cain envied Abel; but he was not healed, and although God Himself continually pleaded with Cain, he became more pained and wave-tossed, and was hurried on to murder. Thus this passion is worse than adultery, and does not easily permit itself to be cured except we pay attention. Let us then by all means tear it up by the roots; let us consider this, that as we offend God when we waste away with envy at other men’s blessings, so when we rejoice with them we are well pleasing to Him, and render ourselves partakers of the good things laid up for the righteous. Therefore Paul exhorts us to ‘rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep’ (Romans 12:15), that on either hand we may reap great profit.”

“If we consider then that even when we don’t labor, by rejoicing with him that labors, we become sharers of his crown. Let us cast aside all envy, and implant love in our souls, that by applauding those of our brethren who are well pleasing to God, we may obtain both present and future good things”.

⁷⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXVII, 3.

⁷¹ That is, in being willing to die under persecution.

Chrysostom took⁷² Christian service to the proper level when he said that true love for our neighbor needs to be at the center of everything. Part of love is feeling compassion for those who weep; more difficult is to avoid envy when we rejoice at honor shown to a brother. If we have true love for our neighbor, we take everything that happens to our neighbor as if it were our own.

“It is possible to bless and not to curse (Romans 12:14), and still not do this out of love; Paul wishes us to be penetrated with the warmth of friendship throughout. This is why he goes on in these words, that we are not only to bless, but even feel compassion for their pains and sufferings, whenever we happen to see them fallen into trouble. To join in the sorrows of mourners one can see why Paul ordered them; but why ever did he command us to rejoice with those who rejoice when it is not such a great matter? That requires a higher Christian vision, to ‘rejoice with those who rejoice, than to weep with those who weep’ (Romans 12:15). We can see this naturally; there is no one so hard-hearted as not to weep over him that is in calamity. But the other requires a very noble soul, so as not only to keep from envying, but even to feel pleasure with the person who is being honored. There is nothing that ties love so firmly as sharing both joy and pain one with another. Just because we are far from difficulties ourselves, we should not remain aloof from sympathizing too. When our neighbor is ill-treated, we ought to make the calamity our own. Take a share in his tears, that we may lighten his low spirits. Take a share in his joy, that we may make the joy strike deep root. Fasten the love firmly, and be of service to yourself rather than just to him in so doing; by our weeping we render ourselves merciful, and by our feeling his pleasure, we purge ourselves of envy and grudging. Let me draw our attention to Paul’s considerateness. He does not say, ‘Put an end to the calamity’, lest we should say in many cases that it is impossible; but he has commanded the easier task, that which we have in our power. Even if we are not able to remove the evil, yet if we contribute tears, we will take the worst half away. If we are not able to increase a man’s prosperity, contribute joy, and we will have made a great addition to it. Therefore it is not abstaining from envy only, but what is a much greater thing that he exhorts us to, namely, joining in the pleasure. This is a much greater thing than not envying.”

Chrysostom further stated⁷³ that “weeping with those who weep” has major implications. The poor are able to do this much better than the rich because the poor are freed from the passions and burdens that the rich carry around. Mercy is the key: how can we more merciful to our fellow man as our Lord is merciful to us? Being merciful brings with it a treasure house of blessings that is incalculable.

“We commit many transgressions every day! Therefore also we need to show much mercy. Let the rich not be high-minded, nor the poor be dejected as giving so little, for the poor often give more than the rich. We must not then make ourselves miserable because we are poor, since it makes alms-giving easier for us. He that has gathered much wealth is often seized with haughtiness, as well as a greater affection for what he has. But he that has little is freed from either of

⁷² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXII, v. 15.

⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XIX, vv. 34-35.

these domineering passions; hence he finds more occasions for doing well. For the poor man will go cheerfully into a prison, will visit the sick, and will give a cup of cold water. But the rich man will generally not take on any office of this sort, as being pampered by his riches. Don't then lose heart at your poverty. For your poverty makes your work for the benefit of the kingdom of heaven easier for you. If you have nothing but have a compassionate soul, even this will be laid up as a reward for you. Paul asked us to 'weep with those who weep' (Romans 12:15), and exhorted us to be to prisoners as though we were chained with them (Hebrews 13:3). It is not only to those that weep that a compassionate man gives some solace, but also to those who are in other afflicting circumstances. There are cases where conversation has as much power to recover him that is cast down as money does. God exhorts us to give money to them that ask, not merely with a view to relieve their poverty, but that He may teach us to be compassionate to the misfortunes of our neighbors. For this the covetous man is odious, in that he not only disregards men in a beggared state, but because he gets himself trained for cruelty and great inhumanity. He who thinks little of money, for their sakes, is even on this account an object of love, that he is merciful and kind to man. Christ, when He blesses the merciful, blesses and praises not those only that give the alms of money, but those also who have the will to do so. Let us then be so inclinable to mercy, and all other blessings will follow; for he that has a spirit of love and mercy, if he have money, will give it away. If he see any in distress, will weep and bewail it; if he falls in with a person wronged, will stand up for him. If he sees one spitefully entreated, he will reach out his hand to him. Since he has that treasure-house of blessings, namely a loving and merciful soul, he will make it a fountain for all his brethren's needs, and will enjoy all the rewards that are laid up with God."

Another type of weeping can occur during repentance for past sins. Cyprian of Carthage lived at a time when some in the Church refused to accept someone back who had lapsed during severe persecution. Cyprian stated⁷⁴ that we should weep with those who weep and accept their repentance. To not do this, we stand on the side of the demons that caused the persecution. Godliness does not get watered down by doing this; instead it gets amplified by our love and care for everyone.

"Considering His love and mercy, we shouldn't be so bitter, cruel, or inhuman in our love for the brethren, but to mourn with those that mourn, and to weep with them that weep, and to raise them up as much as we can by the help and comfort of our love. We should neither being too harsh and obstinate in repelling their repentance; nor be too lax and easy in rashly yielding communion. If a wounded brother lies bleeding in the field of battle; there the devil is striving to slay him whom he has wounded. Here Christ is exhorting that he whom He has redeemed may not wholly perish. Which of the two do we assist? On whose side do we stand? Do we favor the devil that he may destroy, and pass by our prostrate brother, as in the Gospel the priest and Levite did (Luke 10:30-37)? Or rather, as priests of God and Christ, do we imitate what Christ both taught and

⁷⁴ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, LI, 19-20.

See also Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, Letters, XCV, 3.

did, and snatch the wounded man from the jaws of the enemy that we may preserve him cured for God the judge?”

“Dearest brother, the courage of the brethren will not be lessened; martyrdoms will not fail for this cause; repentance will not be relaxed to the lapsed; and the hope of peace will still be offered to the penitent. The strength of the truly believing remains unshaken; and with those who fear and love God with their whole heart, their integrity continues steady and strong. Even to adulterers a time of repentance is granted by us, and peace is given. Yet virginity is not deficient in the Church, nor does the glorious design of continence languish through the sins of others. The Church, crowned with so many virgins, flourishes; and chastity and modesty preserve the tenor of their glory. The vigor of continence is not broken down just because repentance and pardon are facilitated to the adulterer. It is one thing to stand for pardon⁷⁵, another thing to attain to glory. It is one thing, when cast into prison, not to be released until one has paid the uttermost farthing; it is another thing to receive the wages of faith and courage. It is one thing, tortured by long suffering for sins, to be cleansed and purged by fire⁷⁶; it is another to have purged all sins by suffering. It is one thing to be in suspense till the sentence of God at the Day of Judgment; it is another to be immediately crowned by the Lord.”

John Chrysostom asked us to notice⁷⁷ the irrational creatures as an example for how we are to behave. The ant teaches us to work hard for our families. The honeybee teaches us to labor for others, and not to seek just our own things. Those who have wealth or who can teach can use these gifts of God to help others. In contrast, the spider has great skills, but uses these skills just for himself. We can also imitate the simplicity of the dove and the love of the donkey and the ox for their masters.

“When God stocked the world with various animals, and implanted diverse dispositions in the creatures, He commanded us to imitate some of these, and to avoid others. For example; the ant is industrious, and performs a laborious task. By paying attention then, you will receive the strongest admonition from this animal not to indulge in sloth, nor to shun labor and toil. Therefore also the Scripture has sent the sluggard to the ant, saying, ‘Go to the ant, O sluggard; and see, and emulate his ways, and become wiser than he’ (Proverbs 6:6). Are you unwilling, he means, to learn from the Scriptures, that it is good to labor, and that he who will not work, neither ought he to eat? (2 Thessalonians 3:10) Learn it from the irrational animals! This also we do in our families, when those who are older, and who are considered superior, have done amiss, we ask them to attend to thoughtful children. We say, ‘Notice such a one, who is less than you, how earnest and watchful he is’. Receive from this animal the best exhortation to industry; and marvel at your Lord, not only because He has made heaven and the sun, but because He has also made the ant. Although the animal is small, it affords much proof of the greatness of God’s wisdom. Consider then how

⁷⁵ These series of contrasts are presented as if one were just getting by in the Christian life versus doing very well and being rewarded for faithfulness.

⁷⁶ Paul said, “each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13).

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XII, 5.

prudent the ant is, and consider how God has implanted in so small a body, such an unceasing desire for working! But while from this animal you learn industry, take from the honeybee a lesson of neatness, industry, and social concord! For it is not more for herself than for us, that the honeybee labors, and toils every day; which is indeed a thing especially proper for a Christian; not to seek his own things, but the things of others. The honeybee traverses all the meadows that she may prepare a banquet for another, so also, O man, do likewise. If you have accumulated wealth, spend it on others; if you have the faculty of teaching (1 Timothy 5:17, Romans 12:7), do not bury the talent, but bring it out publicly for the sake of those who need it! If you have any other advantage, become useful to those who require the benefit of your labors! Do you notice that for this reason, especially, the honeybee is more honored than the other animals; not because she labors, but because she labors for others? The spider also labors, and toils, and spreads out his fine textures over the walls, surpassing the utmost skill of woman. But the creature is without estimation, since his work is in no way profitable to us; such are they that labor and toil, but for themselves! Imitate too the simplicity of the dove! Imitate the donkey in his love to his master, and the ox also! Imitate the birds in their freedom from anxiety! For great, great indeed is the advantage that may be gained from irrational creatures for the correction of manners.

Appendix A The Mosaic Law

The Mosaic Law consisted of Commandments, Statutes, Judgments and Testimonies. The core of the Law was what Jesus called the “Greatest Commandment”, and on this hangs all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37-40). The full text of the “Greatest Commandment” was “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18, Romans 13:8-10). Tertullian described⁷⁸ the Greatest Commandment as having been given in embryo to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that if Adam and Eve had obeyed it, they would not have fallen. Thus the Gentiles had the Law prior to Moses. But the Mosaic Law bridged a gap until the coming of Christ when the Law would be written on men’s hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and the Holy Spirit would take up residence in men’s bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Until then the Lord commanded that the Law should be written in stone on Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8) as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry.

The Law is still useful today, especially for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), and early Apostolic teaching warned⁷⁹ people about speaking evil of the Law. When Christ came, He stated, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod (smallest Hebrew letter) or one piece of a Hebrew letter (about the size of the dot of an i) will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18). Tertullian stated⁸⁰, “Plainly we assert that the Law has deceased in one sense, that its burdens, which not even the fathers were able to sustain, have wholly ceased. Such parts, however, as relate to righteousness not only permanently remain reserved, but even amplified, in order that our righteousness may be able to redound above the righteousness of the scribes and of the Pharisees”.

Commandments.

- The Ten Commandments, which give details of the Greatest Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:6-21)
- Atonement for sin in anticipation of the work of Christ (Leviticus 4, 5, Numbers 15)
- Separation from the world; no intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1-11, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- Tithes and Alms to guard against greed (Deuteronomy 26, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
- The year of remission to teach forgiveness (Deuteronomy 15:1-18, Mark 11:25, James 2:13)
- Manna to teach about real food (Deuteronomy 8:1-10, John 6:31-58)
- Blessings for those who obey; curses for those who don’t (Deuteronomy 28, Matthew 25:14-46)

Statutes.

- The Major Festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles
- Portions for the priests (Leviticus 6:14-30; 7; 10:12-20, Numbers 18:8-24, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Duties of the priests before God in the House of God (Exodus 27-30, Leviticus 10:8-11)
- Maintain holiness and avoid uncleanness (Leviticus 20, Numbers 19, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, 1 John 2:6)
- Evenhandedness for Jew and Gentile (Numbers 15:14-16, Leviticus 19:33-34, Ephesians 2:11-22)

Judgments. The Judgments represent “case law” that resolved some uncertainty on how to interpret the Mosaic Law. Some examples are the question of inheritance brought by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11), and the question of working on the Sabbath during the 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 15:32-36). Difficult cases were brought to the Levitical judges in Jerusalem for a decision, and

⁷⁸ Tertullian, Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2.

⁷⁹ Apostolic Constitutions, VI, IV, xix.

⁸⁰ Tertullian, On Monogamy IV, vi, 7.

if the Levitical judges had difficulty, they brought the case before the Lord Himself in the Holy of Holies for a decision (Deuteronomy 17:8-13; 19:15-21; 1:17; Numbers 28:21).

Testimonies. The Testimony or Witness (i.e. singular) was the Ark of the Covenant that was kept in the Holy of Holies, and upon which the Lord dwelt between the Cherubim (Numbers 7:89). Things associated with the Presence of God are also referred to as part of the Testimony. For example, there is the Ark of the Testimony, the Tent (or Tabernacle) of the Testimony (Numbers 1:53), the Veil of Testimony (Leviticus 24:3), and the Tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 31:18) which were in the Ark (Deuteronomy 10:5). The Testimonies or Witnesses (i.e. plural) are the recorded deeds and mercies of God among His people.

Appendix B

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments, also called “The Ten Words” (from Deuteronomy 4:13, Exodus 34:1), are only a part of the Mosaic Law. For a more general summary of the Law, see Appendix A “The Mosaic Law”. The Orthodox Church today features the Ten Commandments as a means of self-examination prior to the Sacrament of Confession. The following summary of the Ten Commandments is divided into two parts as the Lord divided the “Greatest Commandment”.

LOVE OF GOD

1. **God.** This Commandment defines the God who led Israel out of Egypt (later revealed as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as having first place in our lives. Violations of this Commandment include failure to trust Him and His mercy, complaining against Him, ungratefulness toward Him, falling for superstitions or heretics and neglecting God out of fear of ridicule. If God has first place, then each believer needs to put his own interests second, and to pray regularly.
2. **Idols.** An idol (literally carved image) can be any person, animal or thing that takes us away from the worship of God. To guard against this, we can imitate the life of Christ, read the Scriptures, pay careful attention during the worship of the Church, and be careful to receive the Lord’s Supper in faith regularly.
3. **The Name.** The Name of God has always been revered, and devout Jews today refer to God as *Ha Shem* (i.e. The Name) rather than pronounce the holy Name of God. In contrast to this, profanity, cursing and false oaths are a violation of respect due to God. Since the people and objects associated with the Lord are also called holy (Leviticus 19:2, Exodus 30:25-33) and we are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), respect for The Name carries over to them.

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

4. **The Sabbath.** The Sabbath was instituted for man so that he didn’t work himself to death like in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15, Mark 2:27). As such, it was modeled after God’s own example at the Creation (Exodus 20:11). The Sabbath was also a sign and a perpetual covenant between God and His people (Exodus 31:13-17). It was a holy day on which God’s people took time off to remember the things of God (Exodus 16:23, 20:8-11).
5. **Parents.** Respect for parents as opposed to neglect and deception toward them was tied to a long life in the Promised Land. It was customary for aged parents to live with their families and tribes, and even for the aged parents to have a governing role over their extended family.
6. **Murder.** Besides the actual taking of another’s life, the Lord applied this commandment to anger toward, hatred of, and disrespect for others (Matthew 5:21-26). It also applies to cruelty toward any of God’s creatures including us, and implies that our attitude toward everyone should be forgiveness and not vengeance.
7. **Adultery.** The Lord applied this commandment beyond the physical act to any kind of lust, degradation or obscenity either alone or with others (Matthew 5:27-32). In this context, He said that the eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22-23) and that our soul is illumined by whatever we allow our eyes to behold, either good or bad.
8. **Theft.** The Apostle Paul addressed the opposite of theft. That is, he counseled the repentant thief to work in order to give alms (Ephesians 4:28). In keeping with the spirit of the other commandments, avoiding theft implies being honest and upright but also implies avoiding such things as cheating, skipping on debts and wastefulness.
9. **Deceit.** False witness had to do with testimony at the judgment of a dispute. But lying can take many forms: half-truths, careless statements, concealing the truth, betraying secrets, backbiting and gossip. The opposite of false witness is an honest attempt at trying to see the good in everyone.

10. **Covetousness.** Covetousness, including envy and jealousy, can be difficult to overcome since it is the driving force behind most capitalistic economies. Yet contentedness with one's lot in life is a virtue along with graciousness and generosity.

THE PARALYTIC LOWERED THROUGH THE ROOF

July 28, 2019
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision B

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Today's Gospel lesson is also used for the Second Sunday in Lent and is read there from Mark 2. In Mark's account, the paralytic was brought to Jesus by opening the roof under which Jesus was teaching; Matthew doesn't mention this. Matthew's account simply states, "They brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed" (Matthew 9:2), but doesn't say how he was brought.

1st Century Palestine House Construction

To understand the mechanics of today's Gospel lesson, (that is, how a paralytic on a bed could be lowered through the roof) we need to understand how houses were constructed in 1st century Palestine. Most houses were constructed out of sun-dried brick and were one-story dwellings. The walls were whitewashed inside and outside with lime or gypsum. Windows were small and few, had no glass, and were covered with a latticework that could be opened – probably like simple venetian blinds. Most houses had at least one courtyard on the interior, where windows usually opened to the courtyard. Well-to-do houses may have had several courtyards.

Roofs of houses were generally flat. For most houses, roofing consisted of boughs on top of rafters and covered with stomped dirt. A better class of houses had roofs of clay tile and stone. These were obviously more water-tight during heavy rains. In the parallel account (from Luke 5:20) we find that the house in the Gospel lesson had a clay tile roof. This better class of houses also had a railing around the edge to prevent accidental falls.

Roofs were not delicate areas like today; they were a part of the living quarters where people lived and moved about. There was generally a stairway to the roof from the courtyard and also a stairway to the roof from outside the house. In Matthew 24:17 where Jesus warns him who is on the housetop not to go down to take anything out of the house, but to flee quickly, the implication is to use the outside stairway, not the inside stairway.

Some uses of the roof area mentioned in the Scriptures are shown in Table 1:

Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8; (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

The setting is Capernaum (i.e. His own city, Matthew 9:1) in Galilee, near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The house in which Jesus was speaking belonged to someone who was well-to-do as indicated by the reference to a tiled roof (Luke 5:19). Thus, the house was fairly large with a large courtyard. Sometimes the courtyards had a roof, so Jesus may have been speaking in a roofed courtyard.

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Table 1
Uses of the Roof Area in Scripture

Use of Roof	Reference
Private discussions	1 Samuel 9:25
Sleeping, especially in hot summers	1 Samuel 9:26
Construction of Booths during the Feast of Tabernacles	Nehemiah 8:16
Watching for the approach of an enemy	Isaiah 22:1
Waiting for good tidings	2 Samuel 18:24, 33
Making announcements	Matthew 10:27; Luke 12:3
Lamentation	Isaiah 15:3; Jeremiah 48:38
Home altars for family idols	2 Kings 23:12; Jeremiah 19:13; Zephaniah 1:5
Harem of Absalom's concubines	2 Samuel 16:21-22

Many people crowded into the house. If Jesus was speaking in the courtyard, people probably crowded into each room to listen through the windows that opened onto the courtyard. Thus all access to Jesus was cut off by crowds. If Jesus was speaking in a covered courtyard, the inside stairway was probably blocked. However, the outside stairway was not blocked since this was far away from the action.

The time of year was Autumn of the first year of Jesus' public ministry. Some of the Twelve have been called, but not all. In the verses following today's Gospel lesson, Matthew, the tax collector, was called as an Apostle.

The enterprising four men carrying the paralytic (Matthew 9:3-4) could easily tell where Jesus was speaking. As a man who could preach outdoors to large audiences (e.g. 5000 men plus women and children, Luke 9:11, 14; Matthew 14:21), Jesus' voice could easily be heard through the roof. So they removed the tiles above Him, and let the paralytic down by ropes attached to the four corners of his stretcher-like pallet. Since the paralytic is always mentioned as lying on the pallet, the implication is that he was a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the neck down.

This was a very bold move. The owner of the house was likely present, but nowhere is there mentioned any objection to people tearing up his house. It's possible that the paralytic may have been related to the owner of the house.

Jesus Forgives the Sins of the Paralytic

Jesus' first reaction was to forgive the sins of the Paralytic. This implies that the Paralytic and the four men carrying him were rather devout. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the Paralytic: 'Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you'" (Matthew 9:2).

We might compare this Paralytic to the Paralytic lying by the Pool of Bethesda (John 5). This paralytic had a number of people to help him; the other had no one (John 5:7). This Paralytic and his helpers exhibited faith worthy of the Lord's commendation, the other had some

problem with sin that had caused his condition (John 5:14). For more details concerning the Paralytic by the Pool of Bethesda, see the Gospel lesson for the 3rd Sunday of Pascha.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁸¹ that sin itself was a dreadful paralysis for the man by the pool of Bethesda, who was paralyzed for 38 years. “A dreadful, dreadful paralysis is sin, or rather it is not paralysis only, but also somewhat more grievous. Such a one is not only inactive as to good works, but also is active doing evil works. But nevertheless, though someone is so disposed, if he is willing to rouse himself a little, all the terrors are at an end.”

In comparing these two paralytics, one is struck with the sacrifice and dedication of the four men who carried the paralytic of today’s Gospel lesson. Besides carrying him to Jesus and opening up the roof – not an easy task – they probably had to care for the man on a daily basis also. This is a very good illustration of the teaching of the Epistle lesson. And it is interesting to note that Jesus forgave the Paralytic his sins at least partly in response to the faith of the four men that carried him.

John Chrysostom stated⁸² that in most cases, it is the faith of the person healed that is the most instrumental factor in the healing. There are some cases where the person healed is too sick or too darkened to have faith. But in examining the circumstances of the Paralytic in this account, we see that he exhibits some faith in being willing to be subjected to the scrutiny of a large gathering of the religious leaders.

“There are some who say that the paralytic was healed merely because those who brought him believed; but this is not obvious. ‘When Jesus saw their faith’ (Matthew 9:2) refers not merely to those who brought the man but also to the man who was brought⁸³. ‘Is not one man healed’, you say, ‘because another has believed?’ For my part I do not think so unless owing to immaturity of age or excessive infirmity, he is in some way incapable of believing. How about the case of the woman of Canaan; the mother believed but the daughter was cured? And how was it that the servant of the centurion who believed rose from the sick bed and was preserved? It happened this way because the sick persons themselves were not able to believe!”

“Hear then what the woman of Canaan says: ‘My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon’ (Matthew 15:22-28, Mark 7:25-30). How could she believe whose mind was darkened and possessed by a demon, and was never able to control herself? As in the case of the woman of Canaan so also in the case of the centurion; his servant lay sick in the house (Matthew 8:5-13), not knowing Christ or who He was. How was he to believe in one who was unknown to him, and of whom he had never obtained any experience?”

“In the case of the paralytic, we must consider the manner of his approach to Christ. They let the man down through the roof; but consider how great a matter it is for a sick man to have the fortitude to undergo this. Invalids are often

⁸¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 4.

⁸² John Chrysostom, Homily on the Paralytic Let Down Through the Roof, 5.

⁸³ In another place Chrysostom said, “Jesus does not on all occasions require faith on the part of the sick only; as for instance, when they are insane, or in any other way, through their disease, are out of their own control. In this case the sick man too had part in the faith; for he would not have allowed himself to be let down, unless he had believed.” See John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXIX, 1.

so faint-hearted and difficult to please as often to decline the treatment administered to them on their sick bed, and to prefer bearing their pain to undergoing the annoyance caused by the remedies. But this man had the fortitude to go outside the house, and to be carried into the midst of the market place, and to exhibit himself in the presence of a crowd. Often sick folk prefer to die under their disorder rather than disclose their personal calamities. This sick man, however, did not act thus, but when he saw that the place of assembly was filled, the approaches blocked, the haven of refuge obstructed, he submitted to be let down through the roof. 'For he also that seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened' (Matthew 7:8). The man did not say to his friends, 'What is the meaning of this? Why make this fuss? Let us wait until the house is cleared and the assembly is dissolved. The crowds will withdraw and we shall then be able to approach him privately and confer about these matters. Why should you expose my misfortunes in the midst of all the spectators?' That man said none of these things either to himself or to his bearers, but regarded it as an honor to have so many persons made witnesses of his cure. We can discern his faith also from the words of Christ. After he had been let down and presented, Christ said to him, 'Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven' (Matthew 9:2). And when he heard these words he was not indignant, he did not complain, he did not say to the physician, 'What do you mean by this? I came to be healed of one thing and you heal another! He neither spoke nor thought any of these things, but waited, allowing the physician to adopt the method of healing which He desired. For this reason also Christ did not go to him, but waited for him to come, that He might exhibit his faith to everyone."

Cyril of Jerusalem looked at this⁸⁴ a little differently. The primary factor in the healing was the faith of the four men carrying the paralytic. The paralytic himself was living under a load of sin; yet he must have had a little faith to be willing to go through with the ordeal.

"Faith has so much power, that not only the believer is saved, but some have been saved by others believing. The paralytic in Capernaum was not a believer, but they believed who brought him, and let him down through the tiles; for the sick man's soul shared the sickness of his body. Don't think that I accuse him without cause; the Gospel says, when Jesus saw, not his faith, but their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Arise!' (Matthew 9:6) The bearers believed, and the paralytic enjoyed the blessing of the cure."

Cyril of Alexandria also stated⁸⁵ that the primary factor in the healing of the paralytic was the faith of the four men who carried him. He stated that Jesus had to heal the soul first; otherwise it would just be an opportunity for the paralytic to sin even more by being able to walk. As God, Jesus was able to see the problems with the soul that brought on the paralysis.

⁸⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, V, 8.

⁸⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Chapter 5, p. 111, Studion Publishers, 1983.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁸⁶ that Jesus sometimes proclaimed the faith of the soul of the recipient before He healed their body. In the case of the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus first raised up his fallen soul.

“Jesus’ love for man has a kind of proportion; it depends on the faith of them that are healed. But not for these causes only did He require faith of the blind men, but since they called Him ‘Son of David’. To lead them up to what is higher, and to teach them to entertain the imaginations they ought of Himself, He said, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ (Matthew 9:28) He did not say, ‘Do you believe that I am able to entreat my Father, that I am able to pray’ but, ‘that I am able to do this?’”

“What then is their answer? ‘Yes, Lord!’ They don’t call Him Son of David anymore, but soar higher, and acknowledge His dominion.”

“At last He laid His hand on them, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’ (Matthew 9:29). He did this to confirm their faith, and to show that they are participators in the good work, and to witness that their words were not words of flattery. He didn’t say, ‘Let your eyes be opened’, but, ‘According to your faith let it be to you’; which He said to many of them that came to Him. Before the healing of their bodies, He hastened to proclaim the faith in their soul; so as both to make them more approved, and to render others more serious. The same with the paralyzed man; before giving nerve to the body, He raised up the fallen soul, saying, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you’ (Matthew 9:2). And the young girl too, when He had raised her up, He paused, and by the food taught her about her Benefactor (Mark 5:43). In the case of the centurion also He did in like manner, leaving the whole to his faith (Matthew 8:13); and as to His disciples again, when delivering them from the storm on the sea (Matthew 8:25-26). He delivered the disciples first from their lack of faith. Just so likewise in this case: He knew even before the cry of the blind men, the secrets of their mind. That He might lead on others to the same earnestness, He makes them known to the rest as well, by the result of their cure proclaiming their hidden faith.”

Jesus healed another paralytic also after first proclaiming the faith of his master: the centurion of great faith. Chrysostom pointed out⁸⁷ how the centurion’s faith was greater than that of the four men that let the paralytic down through the roof. In a similar fashion, Jesus brought out the faith of the centurion as he had brought out the faith of the four men who carried the paralytic.

“The centurion came to Jesus and said, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented’ (Matthew 8:6). Now some say, that by way of excuse the centurion mentioned the cause, why he had not brought him. ‘For neither was it possible’, the centurion said, ‘paralyzed as he was, and tormented, and at his last gasp, to lift and convey him’. That the servant was at the point of expiring, Luke said, ‘He was ready to die’ (Luke 7:2). This is a sign of the centurion having great faith, even much greater than those who let one down through the roof. Because the centurion knew for certain, that even a mere

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 1.

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVI, 1.

command was enough for the raising up of the patient, he thought it superfluous to bring him.”

“What then does Jesus do? What He had in no case done before, here He does. Whereas on every occasion Jesus followed the wish of His supplicants, here He rather springs toward it, and offers not only to heal him, but also to come to the house. This Jesus does, that we might learn the virtue of the centurion. If Jesus had not made this offer, but had said immediately, ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you’ (Matthew 8:13); we would not have known the faith of the centurion.”

Chrysostom further addressed⁸⁸ the connection between sin and disease and stated that most are connected. Sins produce diseases that are similar; but they are all for our benefit. Christ spoke similarly to two paralytics (one by the pool and one let down through the roof), both having problems with sin. Some may slander these paralytics, but Christ seems to be working for their spiritual benefit.

“‘What then’, said one, ‘do all diseases proceed from sin?’ Not all, but most of them; and some proceed from different kinds of loose living, since gluttony, intemperance and sloth produce sufferings akin to the sin. But the one rule we have to observe is to bear every stroke thankfully; for they are sent because of our sins. In this manner King Asa suffered from gout for not trusting in God (2 Chronicles 16:1-13); these diseases are sent to make us approved, as the Lord said to Job, ‘Do you think that I have dealt with you in any other way, than might appear to you to be righteous?’” (Job 40:8 LXX)

“But why is it that in the case of two paralytics Christ brings forward their sins? He said to the paralytic let down through the roof, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you’ (Matthew 9:2); and to the paralytic by the Pool of Bethesda, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you’ (John 5:14). I know that some slander this second paralytic, asserting that he was an accuser of Christ, and that therefore this speech was addressed to him; what then shall we say of the other let down through the roof, who heard nearly the same words? Christ said to him also, ‘Your sins are forgiven you’. It is clear, that neither man was addressed on the account which some allege. We may see this more clearly from what follows; for John noted that Jesus spoke this to him after He found him in the Temple, which is an indication of his great piety. He didn’t depart into the market places, nor give himself up to luxury and ease, but remained in the Temple, although about to sustain a violent attack and to be harassed by all there. Yet none of these things persuaded him to depart from the Temple. Moreover when Christ found him, even after he had conversed with the Jews, He implied nothing of the kind. Had Christ desired to charge him with sin, He would have said to him, ‘Are you again attempting the same sins as before; are you not made better by your cure?’ Yet He said nothing of the kind; He merely secured him for the future.”

“When Jesus had cured the halt and maimed (Luke 4:38-41, 6:17-20), why then did He not in any instance make mention of sin in their lives? I think that the diseases of the paralytics arose from acts of sin, those of the others from natural

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXVIII, 1-2.

infirmity. If this is not so, then by means of the paralytics, and by the words spoken to them, He has spoken to the rest also. Since this paralysis (quadriplegic) is worse than any other, by the greater He corrects the less also.”

The Scribes and Pharisees Object to Jesus Forgiving Sins

Scribes and Pharisees (Luke 5:21) were present when Jesus forgave the Paralytic – one of them may have owned the house – and immediately began reasoning in their minds that this was blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins and even then, not without the shedding of blood in an animal sacrifice.

Cyril of Alexandria stated⁸⁹ that because a large number of Scribes and Pharisees had assembled in the house, Jesus felt that some especially Divine miracle should be done for their benefit. They regarded Him with scorn because He associated with prostitutes and tax collectors. Here was an opportunity to see Him as He really is. The first thing Jesus did to enlighten them is to forgive sins – which only God can do. Their first thought was that Jesus was uttering blasphemy – for which the penalty was death by stoning (Leviticus 24:16). As God, Jesus read their thoughts and questioned them about it. Then He healed the paralytic before their eyes to demonstrate again that He really is God.

John Chrysostom stated⁹⁰ that the forgiveness of sins is a much greater thing than the raising up of a body. Jesus did the difficult thing first; then to prove His point, He also did the easier thing. Some had objected that forgiveness is commonly done by kings and rulers; however, the granting of a pardon in this life is not at all the same as the forgiveness of sins.

“The priest, as in a kind of image, signifies to us by deed the things which we have believed and confessed in words. When without a sign we believe, then he gives us the sign also; when we have done our own part, then also does God fully assure us. How and in what manner? By the water! Being baptized, immersed and then emerging, is a symbol of the descent into Hades and return from there. Paul also calls baptism a burial, saying, ‘Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death’ (Romans 6:4). By this he makes the resurrection of our bodies to become credible. For the blotting out sins is a much greater thing than the raising up of a body. This Christ declares saying, ‘For which is easier, to say, ‘*Your* sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ (Matthew 9:5). ‘Forgiving sins is the more difficult’, said He, ‘but since you disbelieve it as being hidden, and make the easier instead of the more difficult the demonstration of my power, neither will I refuse to afford you this proof’. Then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house’” (Matthew 9:6).

“‘And how is this difficult’, said one, ‘when it is possible for kings and rulers to do so also? They too forgive adulterers and murderers’. You are kidding, man, who say these things. To forgive sins is possible only with God. But rulers and kings, whether it is adulterers whom they pardon or murderers, release them from the present punishment; but they do not purge out sin. Though

⁸⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 5, p. 111, Studion Publishers, 1983.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XL, 2.

those that have been forgiven should advance to offices; though they should invest them with the purple itself; though they should set the crown on their heads, they would only make them kings; but they could not free them from their sin. It is God alone who does this.”

The Deity of Christ

The real issue that is on display in all of this is the Deity of Christ. The Scribes and Pharisees consistently denied this! After Pentecost, things started to change and ‘a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:7). This continued under the ministry of James the Lord’s brother, such that when Paul visited Jerusalem in c. 57 AD, James pointed out, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed’ (Acts 21:20). Before the Crucifixion, however, most of the Jewish leaders had nothing but hatred and rage toward Christ.

John Chrysostom remarked how Jesus signified in all ways that He is equal in honor with Him that begat Him. He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes (Matthew 7:29, 8:3). He only had to speak the word for someone to be healed (Matthew 8:8). Even the winds and the sea obeyed Him (Matthew 8:27). The demons acknowledged Him as God and He cast them out with great authority (Matthew 8:29-32).

To illustrate this here, Jesus made use of the envy of His enemies to manifest the miracle, yet He did so with great gentleness. He did three things that only God can do: First, He forgave the sins of the Paralytic (Matthew 9:2). Secondly He read the thoughts of the Scribes. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (Matthew 9:4). And third, to prove that this was God and that He had the authority to forgive sins, He said, “Which is easier to say, ‘your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘arise and walk’”? Jesus continued, just to dispel any doubts, “But that you (the Scribes and Pharisees) may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” – then He said to the paralytic – “Arise, take up your bed and go to your house” (Matthew 9:6).

The reaction of the crowd was one of marvel; they “glorified God who had given such power to men” (Matthew 9:8). Mark adds the words of the crowd, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:12).

Chrysostom stated⁹¹ that Jesus was demonstrating that He is God by the healing of the paralytic. Forgiving sins is more difficult than healing a quadriplegic; therefore when Jesus healed the paralytic, there was nothing anyone could say to criticize Him about His claim to being God.

“In the instance of the paralytic let down through the roof, there was a double paralysis. There was that of the soul by sins, and also that of the body. What then did the Lord do? ‘Son,’ said He, ‘be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you’ (Matthew 9:2). He first loosed the bonds of the real and true paralysis, and then proceeded to the other. ‘At once some of the scribes said within them, "This Man blasphemeth!" But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are

⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, vv. 1-2.

forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" -- then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (Matthew 9:3-6). Having wrought the invisible miracle, He confirmed it by the visible, the spiritual by the bodily cure. Why did He do it this way? That it might be fulfilled, which is spoken, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, *you* wicked servant' (Luke 19:22). What did they say? 'Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (Mark 2:7) Of course, therefore, no Angel, Archangel, or any other created power can do this. This you have yourselves confessed. What then ought to be said? If I shall be shown to have forgiven sins, it is fully evident that I am God. However, Christ didn't say it this way; but what did He say? 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins; then He said to the paralytic, 'Arise, and take up your bed, and go to your house' (Matthew 9:6). What Jesus was saying is that when I work the more difficult miracle, it is plain that there is no pretext left to you, no room for criticism about the easier one. Hence it was that He wrought the invisible miracle first, because there were many critics; and then He led them from the invisible to the visible to demonstrate that He really is God."

Chrysostom further noted⁹² that many people had trouble with Jesus referring to Himself as God. Therefore He didn't say this very often. Christ's mission was not to exalt Himself as God, but to attract people to want to be saved.

"When Jesus made Himself equal with God, they said, 'This man blasphemes' (Matthew 9:3); and when He said, 'Your sins are forgiven you' (Matthew 9:2), they called Him a demoniac (Matthew 9:34). So when He said that the man who hears His words is stronger than death (John 5:24, 8:51), or, 'I am in the Father and the Father in Me' (John 14:10-11), they left Him; again, they were offended when He said that He came down from heaven (Matthew 6:33, 60). If now they could not bear these sayings, though seldom uttered, had His discourse been always of this texture, would they have paid attention to Him? When He said, 'As the Father gave Me commandment, so I do' (John 14:31); and, 'I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true' (Matthew 7:28), then they believe. That they did believe then is clear, 'As He spoke these words, many believed on Him'" (John 8:30, 4:39, 7:31, 10:42, 12:11, 42).

Athanasius of Alexandria spent his entire life fighting the Arian heresy – which said that the Son was not equal to the Father. Many times he had to go to the Scriptures to point out⁹³ that the Arians were wrong.

"On the Father Angels wait, and the Son too is worshipped by them, 'And let all the Angels of God worship Him' (Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX, Hebrews 1:6); and He is said to be Lord of Angels (Psalm 103:20, 148:2), for 'Angels came and ministered to Him' (Matthew 4:11),' and 'the Son of Man shall send His Angels with a great sound of a trumpet' (Matthew 24:31). He is honored as the Father, 'that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not

⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIV, 1.

⁹³ Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia (De Synodis), 49.

honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him' (John 5:23). Being equal to God, 'He, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God' (Philippians 2:6): — the being Truth from the True, and Life from the Living, as being truly from the Fountain, even the Father; — the quickening and raising the dead as the Father. Of the Father it is written, 'The Lord our God is one Lord' (Deuteronomy 6:4), and, 'The God of gods, the Lord, has spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof' (Psalm 50:1), and of the Son, 'God is the Lord, and He has shined upon us' (Psalm 118:27) and, 'The God of gods shall be seen in Zion' (Psalm 84:7). And again of God, Micah says, 'Who is a God like thee, cancelling iniquities, and passing over the sins of the remnant of his inheritance? He has not kept his anger for a testimony, for He delights in mercy' (Micah 7:18). But the Son said to whom He would, 'Your sins are forgiven'; for instance, when the Jews were murmuring, He demonstrated the remission by His act, saying to them, 'For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?' (Matthew 9:5, Mark 2:11) And of God Paul says, 'To the King eternal' (1 Timothy 1:17); and again of the Son, David says, 'Lift up your gates, you princes, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in' (Psalm 24:7). And Daniel heard it said, 'His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and His Kingdom shall not be destroyed' (Daniel 4:3, 7:14). And in a word, all that you find said of the Father, so much will you find said of the Son, all but His being Father."

Athanasius further pointed out⁹⁴ how the Father and the Son are related like the sun is to the radiance produced by the sun. The sun and its radiance are not two separate things; they are related as cause and effect. So is the Godhead of the Father and the Son; It is One Light; so that the Son can say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

"Jesus said, 'I and the Father are One' (John 10:30). He added, 'I in the Father and the Father in Me' (John 17:21), by way of showing the identity of Godhead and the unity of Essence. For they are one, not as one thing divided into two parts, nor as one thing twice named, so that the Same becomes at one time Father, at another His own Son; because he held this Sabellius was judged a heretic⁹⁵. But They are two, because the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father; but the nature is one; (for the offspring is not unlike its parent, for it is his image), and all that is the Father's, is the Son's. Therefore neither is the Son another God, for He was not procured from without, otherwise there would be many, if godhead were procured foreign from the Father's. If the Son is another person, as an Offspring, still He is the Same as God; and He and the Father are one in propriety and peculiarity of nature, and in the identity of the one Godhead. For the radiance of the sun also is light, not second to the sun, nor a different light, nor from participation of it, but a whole

⁹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Four Discourses Against the Arians, III, xxiii, 4.

⁹⁵ Sabellius taught that the Father was the Son, and that therefore the Father was crucified by Pilate. Sabellius was first opposed by Tertullian and was excommunicated by Callixtus, Bishop of Rome, in 220 AD. The teachings of Sabellius were finally rejected at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, where it was agreed that the Father and Son are distinct persons, co-eternal, co-equal, and con-substantial. For more details, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabellius>.

and proper offspring of it. Such an offspring is necessarily one light; and no one would say that they are two lights, the sun and radiance from the sun; one is the sun and the light from the sun enlightening in its radiance all things. So also the Godhead of the Son is the Father's; it is indivisible; and thus there is one God and none other but He. Since they are one, and the Godhead itself is one, the same things are said of the Son, which are said of the Father, except His being said to be Father. For instance, the Son is God, 'And the Word was God' (John 1:1); the Son is Almighty, 'Thus said He which was and is and is to come, the Almighty' (Revelation 1:8); the Son is Lord, 'One Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 8:6); the Son is Light, 'I am the Light' (John 8:12, 9:5). The Son also wipes out sins, 'that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins' (Matthew 9:6); and so with other attributes. For the Son Himself says, 'All things that the Father has are Mine' (John 16:15); and again, 'And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them'" (John 17:10).

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹⁶ many times when Jesus confronted the religious leaders over His being God. They could not accept that, even though Jesus made it very clear time and again. They accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath Laws; however, in their greed, they had lost track of the fact that the Sabbath was made for man as a time for doing good⁹⁷.

"When the Jews said about Jesus, 'This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath' (John 9:16), He often healed them anyway, and made His defense for the 'violation' of the Sabbath. Had the sense they assigned to His words been according to their imagination, not according to His intention, He would have corrected them, and said, 'Why do you suppose Me to be equal to God? I am not equal'. Yet He said nothing of the kind; but, on the contrary, He declared by what followed, that He is equal. For, 'As the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will' (John 5:21); and 'That all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him' (John 5:23); and 'The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner' (John 5:19); all these go to establish His equality. Concerning the Law He said, 'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill' (Matthew 5:17). Thus He knows how to remove evil suspicions which are in their minds; but in this place He not only does not remove them, but even confirms their suspicion of His equality with God. On which account also, when they said in another place, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God' (John 10:33). He did not remove their suspicion, but even confirmed it, saying, "'That you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" -- then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house"' (Matthew 9:6). This then He first aimed at, to demonstrate Himself equal with God, showing that He was not God's adversary, but that He said the same and taught the same with Him. Afterwards He addressed Himself to the breach of the Sabbath, saying, 'Did not Moses give

⁹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XLIX, 2.

⁹⁷ See also the Study for the 10th Sunday of Luke (usually early December).

you the Law, yet none of you keeps the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?’ (John 7:19) This was as though He had said, ‘The Law said, “You shall not kill”; but you do kill, and yet you accuse Me as transgressing the Law’. But why did He say, ‘None of you keeps the Law’? Because they all sought to kill Him! ‘And if’, He said, ‘I even have broken the Law, it was in saving a man, but you transgress the Law for evil purposes. If My action even was a transgression, yet it was in order to save a man, and I ought not to be judged by you who transgress in the greatest matters. For your conduct is a subverting of the entire Law’”.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁹⁸ from the Scriptures that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God. In the 1st century as the New Testament Scriptures were being written, people knew about the Father; they had watched the Son demonstrate His Divinity; but they knew nothing clearly about the Holy Spirit. For them, this was a learning process.

“The Son is able by Himself to do that which in the case of baptism He is able to do with the Father and the Holy Spirit; hear these things said plainly. To the Jews Jesus said, ‘That you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’ (Mark 2:10); and again, ‘While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light’ (John 12:36); and ‘I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish’ (John 10:28). Then after this, ‘I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10). Now let us see the Spirit also performing the same thing. Where can we see it? ‘But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all’ (1 Corinthians 12:7); He then that gives these things, much more remits sins. Again, ‘It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing’ (John 6:63); and, ‘He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you’ (Romans 8:11); and, ‘The Spirit is Life because of righteousness’ (Romans 8:10); and, ‘If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law’ (Galatians 5:18). ‘For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father”’ (Romans 8:15). All the wonders too which they then did, they did at the coming of the Spirit. And Paul said, ‘But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God’ (1 Corinthians 6:11). Since then they had heard many things of the Father, and had seen the Son work many things, but as yet knew nothing clearly of the Spirit that Spirit does miracles, and brings in the perfect knowledge.”

Hilary of Poitiers pointed out⁹⁹ that Jesus sometimes professed ignorance of some details, yet exhibited knowledge far beyond our understanding. To question Him on this puts us in the same position as the Scribes and Pharisees who thought in their hearts “This man blasphemes!” We need to understand that God, speaking as God, makes frequent use of human terms, but that this does not mean that He has ceased to remain God.

“The Lord Jesus Christ, ‘Who searches the minds and hearts’ (Revelation 2:23), has no weakness in His nature, that He should not know something; even the fact of His ‘ignorance’ proceeds from the omniscience of His nature. If there

⁹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXVIII, 3.

⁹⁹ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, IX, 66.

are any who impute to Him ignorance, let them tremble, lest He Who knows their thoughts should say to them, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’ (Matthew 9:4) The All-knowing, though not ignorant of thoughts and deeds, sometimes enquires as if He were, as for instance when He asks who it was that touched the hem of His garment (Mark 5:30, Matthew 9:20), or the Apostles, why they quarreled among themselves (Mark 9:33-34), or the mourners, where the sepulcher of Lazarus was (John 11:34). His ‘ignorance’ was not ignorance, except in words. It is against reason that He should know from afar the death and burial of Lazarus (John 11:7-16), but not the place of his sepulcher (John 11:34); that He should read the thoughts of the mind, and not recognize the faith of the woman (Mark 7:24-29); that He should not need to ask concerning anything (John 16:30), yet be ignorant of the dissension of the Apostles. But He, Who knows all things, sometimes by a practice of economy professes ignorance, even though He is not ignorant. Thus, in the case of Abraham, God concealed His knowledge for a time (Genesis 18:17-19); in that of the foolish virgins (Matthew 25:12) and the workers of iniquity (Luke 13:27), He refused to recognize the unworthy; in the mystery of the Son of Man, His asking, as if ignorant, expressed His humanity. He accommodated Himself to the reality of His birth in the flesh in everything to which the weakness of our nature is subject, not in such wise that He became weak in His divine nature. God, born man, assumed the weaknesses of humanity, yet without thereby reducing His unchangeable nature to a weak nature, for the unchangeable nature was that wherein He mysteriously assumed flesh. He, Who was God is man, but, being man, has not ceased to remain God. Conducting Himself then as one born man, and proving Himself such, though remaining God the Word, He often uses the language of man. God, speaking as God, makes frequent use of human terms, and may not know that which it is not yet time to declare, or which is not deserving of His recognition.”

Jesus Gets Ostracized by the Religious Leaders

John Chrysostom made it clear¹⁰⁰ what a confrontation this was. Jesus clearly was demonstrating that He was equal to the Father, as He had done on another occasion. The Scribes and Pharisees present were not ready to accept that, but Jesus made it so clear that they could say nothing to contradict Him. The people present were stunned, however, and said, “We never saw *anything* like this!” (Mark 2:12)

“Here again in another and a greater way Jesus constrained His enemies to confess His equality to the Father in honor, and by their own mouth He makes it clear. They themselves troubled by their malice, and wishing to assail Him, caused even against their will what was done to be conspicuous. Jesus, in His abundance of counsel, made use of their envy for the manifestation of the miracle. Upon their murmuring¹⁰¹, and saying, ‘This man blasphemes; who can forgive sins but God alone?’ (Matthew 9:3, Mark 2:7), let us see what He said. Did He take away the suspicion? If He were not equal, He should have said, ‘Why fix

¹⁰⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXIX, 1.

¹⁰¹ This word translated “murmur” has a stronger meaning than the English would imply. “Attack”, or “Leap upon” would be a closer meaning.

upon me a notion which is not convenient? I am far from this power'. But now has He said none of these things, but quite the contrary. He has both affirmed and ratified, as well by His own voice, as by the performance of the miracle. Because they had said, 'No man can forgive sins but God alone', He added, "'But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" -- then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house"' (Matthew 9:6).

"And not here only, but also in another case again, when they were saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God' (John 10:33). Neither in that instance did He put down this opinion, but again confirmed it, saying, 'If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him'" (John 10:37-38).

Chrysostom noted¹⁰² another sign that Jesus gave to indicate that He was God: namely the revealing of the unuttered thoughts of the hearts of the Scribes and Pharisees. They were probably so stunned that Jesus could do this that they were beyond being speechless.

"Jesus disclosed another sign, and that no small one, of His own Godhead, and of His equality in honor with the Father. Whereas the Scribes and Pharisees said, 'To unbind sins pertains to God only', Jesus not only unbinds sins, but also before this He makes another kind of display in a thing which pertained to God only; the publishing the secrets in the heart. For neither had they uttered what they were thinking. 'At once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"' (Matthew 9:3-4) That it belongs to God only to know men's secrets, listen to what the prophets said, 'You alone know the hearts of the sons of men' (2 Chronicles 6:30); and again, 'For the righteous, God tests the hearts and minds' (Psalm 7:9); and Jeremiah too said, 'The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is the man. Who can know him?' (Jeremiah 17:9 LXX) and, 'Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7). And by many things one may see, that to know what is in the mind belongs to God alone. Implying therefore that He is God, equal to Him that begat Him; the things they were reasoning in themselves (for through fear of the multitude, they did not dare utter their mind), Jesus unveils and makes clear, showing also His great gentleness. 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'" (Matthew 9:4)

Unfortunately, Jesus' warm reception in Capernaum was short-lived. A few months later, Jesus rebuked the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because they didn't repent (Matthew 11:20-24). Perhaps this was because of the Scribes and Pharisees who were present. Later Jesus accused the Scribes and Pharisees of shutting up the Kingdom of Heaven against men (Matthew 23:13). They didn't enter themselves and by their undercutting and false teaching, didn't allow some of those who were entering to go in. This can be compared to the parable of the Sower where some seed fell on the wayside and some fell on rocky ground (Matthew 13:18-21). The Scribes and Pharisees snatched the Word away before the people

¹⁰² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXIX, 2.

understood it (i.e. the wayside); or if the people did understand it, the Pharisees threatened to put them out of the Synagogue (John 9:34-35) if they continued (i.e., the rocky ground).

Thus we have a major contrasting situation: The Paralytic and his friends were exhibiting the true sacrifice that is well-pleasing to God: caring for one another as members of the Kingdom of God. Yet the Scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2) judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel and who were in charge of the sacrificial system that was intended to teach people about the mercy of God, were instead stone-walling it.