

DEMONS AND MENTAL ILLNESS
The Cross Can Be Offensive

October 24, 2010
6th Sunday of Luke
Revision E_half

Gospel: Luke 8:26-39 (Matthew 8:24-34; Mark 5:1-20)
Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18

Today’s Gospel lesson is a real hot potato that people today are hesitant to discuss for fear that someone might be offended. Although accounts of the same events are found in three of the four Gospels, none are used at all in the Western lectionary. On the other hand, this same lesson is used twice in the Orthodox lectionary: today and the 5th Sunday after Pentecost where it is read from Matthew 8. John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria had a great deal to say about this incident in dealing with Matthew and Luke’s account respectively. The theme for today is taken from the text, which relates mental illness in terms of demon possession. The theme for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost takes its theme from John Chrysostom in comparing demon possession to covetousness.

Table of Contents

Gospel: Luke 8:26-39 (Matthew 8:24-34; Mark 5:1-20)	269
Background: Survey of Jesus’ Healings	269
Mental Illness in the Scripture	270
Description of the Demoniacs.....	271
The Demons Ask Permission to Enter Swine	274
The Reaction from the Townsfolk	276
Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18	741
Crucified to the World	741
Boasting or Glorifying in the Cross	744
Enemies of the Cross	746
Offense of the Cross	749
Conclusion of the Word of the Cross, Part I.....	750

Background: Survey of Jesus’ Healings

In Table 1 is an overview of the healings Jesus performed that are recorded in the New Testament. Probably not everything He did was recorded (John 21:25) but Table 1 gives a decent snapshot of a variety of illnesses, ailments and sufferings. All of these conditions occur today and are treated by modern medicine – except the last case, which is called demon possession in the Scriptures. On the other hand, a significant fraction of money spent on modern medicine goes to treat all types of “mental illness” using methods ranging from counseling with psychiatrists to sedatives and padded cells. In the Soviet Union, the tools of this field were sometimes used in fiendish ways to try to “re-educate” enemies of the state – such as Christians. Today’s Gospel lesson presents a much different diagnosis. But first, let us read other accounts in the Scripture that might be loosely classified as “mental illness” in today’s terminology.

Mental Illness in the Scripture

The Mute, Epileptic Child: A man's only child had a severe case of what might be called epilepsy (threw himself down, foamed at the mouth, gnashed his teeth, became rigid). But there was a sinister, organized influence behind this. Epilepsy by itself wouldn't try to drown the child or throw him into the fire. The father knew what was going on and asked the Twelve to cast out the demon; but they couldn't do it. Jesus proceeded to explain "this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:17-29). We infer¹ that the demon also caused the child to be deaf and dumb (Mark 9:25).

Table 1
Healings Done by Jesus

Disease	Who	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Fever (small pox, typhoid)	Nobleman's son				4:46
	Peter's mother-in-law	8:14	1:29	4:38	
Leprosy	One man	8:1	1:40	5:12	
	10 men			17:12	
Paralysis	Down thru roof	9:1	2:1	5:17	
	At pool of Bethesda				5:1
Withered hand	In synagogue	12:9	3:1	6:6	
Hemorrhage	Woman touched Jesus	9:18	5:21	8:40	
Blindness	2 men	9:27			
	1 man		8:22		
	Man born blind				9:1
	Bartimaeus		10:46	18:35	
Back injury	Crippled woman			13:10	
Dropsy	At Pharisee's dinner			14:1	
Severed ear	In Gethsemane			22:47	
General sickness	Multitudes	12:15	3:7	6:17	
	Centurion's servant	8:5		7:1	
	In Gennersaret	14:34	6:53		
	Lame, blind, mute, maimed	15:29	7:31		
Dead raised	Widow's son			7:11	
	Jairus' daughter	9:18	5:21	8:40	
	Lazarus				11:1
	Tombs opened	27:57			
Demoniacs	In synagogue		1:21	4:31	
	Blind & mute demon	12:22	3:7	6:17	
	Gadarene	8:28	5:1	8:26	
	Mute demon	9:32			
	Syro Phoenician	15:21	7:24		
	Epileptic demon	17:14	9:14	9:37	

The Demoniac in the Synagogue: A man with an unclean spirit began by rebuking Jesus in the Synagogue of Capernaum (Mark 1:23-27). Here is a man who (according to modern techniques) just needed some good counseling to help him relate better to others! How would

¹ For more details see the Study for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost, which addresses this account.

modern medicine help this man relate better to the Son of God? There was a basic incompatibility that no amount of counseling will help.

The Blind, Mute Demoniac: A man, who was demon-possessed, blind and mute, was brought to Jesus. In today's world, he would be institutionalized with little hope of rehabilitation. Jesus' healing involved removing the demon; the implication is that the blindness and muteness was caused by the demon (Matthew 12:22-23).

King Nebuchadnezzar During the Time of Daniel: King Nebuchadnezzar had conquered most of the world, including Israel, and had brought a number of the prophets of Israel to Babylon. He also had several dreams that only Daniel could interpret. [King Nebuchadnezzar was no dummy! In order to know for sure that the interpretation of the dream was real he had the interpreter first tell him what he had dreamed!] The dream in Daniel 2 is prophecy concerning the end of the age that the Lord revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar witnessed the three young men (Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego) in the blazing furnace accompanied by One who looked like the Son of God. But in spite of this, King Nebuchadnezzar did not humble himself before the Lord or change his ways.

Therefore, King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, (which Daniel also interpreted), that prophesied that King Nebuchadnezzar would go insane for seven years, living like an animal and eating grass like a cow. For seven years King Nebuchadnezzar lived very much like the poor soul in our Gospel lesson; his hair looked like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws (Daniel 4:24-37).

After seven years, King Nebuchadnezzar repented and his reason returned to him. Not only was his kingdom restored greater than it was, but King Nebuchadnezzar actually wrote the last part of Daniel 4 himself. Note the change in tense from the third person in verse 33 to the first person in verse 34.

The first question that we might ask ourselves is whether mental illness is really some kind of demon oppression or uncleanness. But more than this; we tend to think of people who are demon possessed as poor lost souls. But we usually don't think of what kind of struggles they are going through, especially those that seem to have lost their mind. However, everything is in the hand of God. Some of the Church Fathers pointed out in the following that the care and provision of God was present for the Gadarene demoniacs even while they were being tormented by the demons.

Description of the Demoniacs

The Gospel lesson took place in the winter of 28 AD. (Jesus was crucified in the spring of 30 AD). Jesus and His disciples had just finished rowing across the Sea of Galilee to the Eastern shore, probably in one of the fishing boats. On the way a storm arose and Jesus calmed the storm. The Twelve commented: "Who can this be, that even the winds and the water obey Him?" When they got back to Nazareth after this trip, Jesus sent the Twelve out two by two to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons all by themselves. The Gospel lesson then is a hands-on-lesson in preparation for the sending out of the Twelve. Jesus knew He was going to

do this and he picked a real bearcat as a demonstration. John Chrysostom stated² that since “no man dared to bring these men to Him, Christ Himself went to them.”

As soon as Jesus and the Twelve stepped out of the boat in the country of the Gadarenes³, demon-possessed men met them. Some details about these men:

- There were actually two of them (Matthew 8:28)
- They were naked and lived in the tombs (Luke 8:27)
- They had been like this for a long time (Luke 8:27)
- These men had been locked up, bound with chains and shackles, but they broke the chains (Luke 8:27)
- They were exceedingly fierce, no one could pass that way (Matthew 8:28)
- Night and day these men would cry out and cut themselves with stones (Mark 5:5)

In today’s terminology, they would be classified as a danger to themselves and others (that is, seriously mentally ill). Treatment programs today involve major tranquilizers to sedate them followed by more tranquilizers to “stabilize” them.

Cyril of Alexandria described⁴ the demoniacs as in a worse state than someone who was already dead. This indicates the utter cruelty of the demons; in addition, the demons had deprived the men of any reasoning ability.

“Jesus, in company with the holy disciples, had landed in the country of the Gergesenes; and immediately a man met them, in whom dwelt many unclean spirits. He was void of mind and understanding, and in no respect different from those already dead and laid in the earth; or rather, perhaps, even in a more miserable state. For the dead, carefully wrapped in their grave-clothes, are laid in the earth, like one on his mother's bosom. But he, in great misery and nakedness, wandering among the graves of the dead, was in utter wretchedness, leading a disgraceful and ignominious life. This was a proof of the cruelty of the demons, and a plain demonstration of their impurity. Besides this, it is a charge and accusation against them of hatred to mankind; for they would have no man whatever on earth sober, but wish them to be like one crazy and intoxicated, to know nothing to their profit, and to be left in ignorance of Him Who is the Maker of all. For of whomever they have possession, and have subjected to their power, him they make an example of great misery, deprived of every blessing, destitute of all sobriety, and entirely devoid of reason itself.”

We might also ask why the demoniacs lived in the tombs. John Chrysostom stated that the sorcerers of his day took young children and killed them “in order to have their soul assist them later”. Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-23) also did this until the Apostle Peter exposed⁵ him in his falsehood. The sorcerers used the dead children to “cry out” that they are the soul of such a person using ventriloquism. The demoniacs in the tombs perpetuated this heretical notion as if to imply that the dead become demons after they die. Chrysostom stated⁶ that all this is devoid of reason:

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

³ Matthew refers to the people there as Gergesenes (Matthew 8:28); Gadara and Gergesa were not too far apart and people that lived there could be referred to as either.

⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8, Homily 44, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 191.

⁵ For details, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St. Athanasius Press, 2004, p. 21-27.

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 3.

“It is not reasonable that an injured soul should cooperate with a wrongdoer, or that a man might be able to change an incorporeal power into another substance. In bodies this is impossible; and one cannot make a man’s body become that of a donkey; much more this is impossible in the invisible soul. One cannot transform it into the substance of an evil spirit. These sayings are conjured up only to frighten children.”

“It is also not possible for a soul, torn away from the body, to wander here in this life anymore. ‘The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God’ (Wisdom 3:1 LXX), and if of the righteous, then those children’s souls also. They are not wicked; and the souls of sinners are immediately led away from here. This is obvious from Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-30). And elsewhere Christ said, ‘Tonight your soul will be required of you’ (Luke 12:20). A soul, when it leaves the body, does not wander here. If we, as we go about on the earth, which is familiar and well known to us, are surrounded with a body, when we are journeying in a strange road, we do not know which way to go unless we have someone to lead us. How should the soul know where to walk without the body to show the way?

It is not possible for a disembodied soul to remain here. Stephen said, ‘Receive my spirit’ (Acts 7:59); and Paul said that he wished, ‘to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better’ (Philippians 1:23). Abraham ‘was gathered to his fathers, being cherished in a good old age’ (Genesis 15:15, 25:8 LXX). Regarding proof that the souls of sinners can’t continue here, the rich man pleaded a great deal for this, and didn’t obtain it (Luke 16:27-31). Had it been at all possible, he would have come, and would have told what happened to him there. From this it is evident that after their departure our souls are led away into some place, and have no more power of their own to come back again, but wait for that dreadful day.

When Jesus commanded the demons to come out of the men, the demons begged Jesus not to torment them before the time (Matthew 8:29). This is an interesting request! Night and day, the demons had caused the two men to cry out in pain and cut themselves with stones (Mark 5:5). But yet now the demons don’t want Jesus to hurt them? John Chrysostom stated⁷,

“The demons’ words betray their shameless nature. They said, ‘Have You come here to torment us before the time?’ (Matthew 8:29). That they had sinned, they could not deny; but they demand that they not suffer their punishment before Judgment Day. He had caught them in the act of perpetrating those lawless horrors, and deforming and punishing His creature in every way. They supposed that He, for the excess of their crimes, would not wait for the time of their punishment. Therefore they begged Him. The enmity of the demons is obvious from the start, and the sea that Jesus just calmed was not as stormy as the disposition of these demons. They were invisibly receiving stripes, and suffering things intolerable from His mere presence.”

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 2.

Cyril of Alexandria noted⁸ that the demons asked Jesus, “What have I to do with You”. They had usurped His honor and glory and corrupted His creation. Jesus, as a kind loving shepherd, responded to protect His sheep.

“The Gergesene, or rather the herd of demons lying concealed in him, fell down before Christ's feet, saying, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of God Most High? I beg You, do not torment me’ (Luke 8:28). Observe in the demons the mixture of fear with great audacity, and arrogant pride; and that the words, which they are forced to utter, are coupled with inflated haughtiness! For it is a proof of the pride of the enemy, that he ventures to say, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of God Most High?’ The demons know, for certain, that He is the Son of God Most High, and they confessed this. In claiming adoration from men, they have usurped that which is His, and assumed a glory, which in no possible way is their right. Why then did they claim that Christ had nothing to do with them? With due cause, they had been expelled in their fallen ness from that dignity which is His alone! All men on earth are His; and these they corrupted, removing them far from the knowledge of Him, Who truly is the Lord and Maker of all, and plunged them into the mire of sin, making them worshippers of demons. What earthly king would endure to have those placed under his scepter harassed by barbarians? Or what shepherd is so unfeeling and indifferent, as when savage beasts attack his flocks, to take no heed of the calamity, nor endeavor to aid his sheep? The demons confessed, even against their will, who they are, and to Whom they speak. They uttered words that suit them; such as, ‘I beg You, do not torment me.’”

Jesus then asked the men their name, and the demons replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many!” (Mark 5:9). In the 1st Century, a legion⁹ represented 6,000 soldiers and included some cavalry.

Cyril of Alexandria asked¹⁰ why Jesus asked the demoniacs their name. It was primarily for our benefit so that we might know how wretched the demons are.

“Did Christ then ask because He did not know it, and like one of us, wished to learn it as something that had escaped Him? This is perfectly absurd for us to say or imagine anything of the kind. For being God, ‘He knows all things, and searches the hearts and reins’ (Psalm 7:9 LXX). He asked, therefore, for the plan of salvation's sake that we might learn that a great multitude of demons shared¹¹ the one soul of the man, creating in him a wretched and impure madness. For he was their work, and they indeed ‘are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge’” (Jeremiah 4:22 LXX).

The Demons Ask Permission to Enter Swine

⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8, Homily 44, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 191-192.

⁹ Each legion was divided into 10 parts, each commanded by a Cohort, where each Cohort commanded 6 Centurions. Each Centurion commanded 100 soldiers.

¹⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8, Homily 44, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 192.

¹¹ The word *mateneimato*, which he renders “divided” or “shared”, has probably only the meaning of “possessed”, the proper signification being to “graze off the land with cattle”.

The demons then begged Jesus that He might allow them to enter a herd of swine, about 2,000 (Mark 5:13), that were feeding a good way off from them (Matthew 8:30). Jesus permitted them to do so and suddenly the whole herd ran violently down the steep embankment into the lake and drowned.

Why did the demons request of Jesus to enter the swine, and then immediately destroy the swine? John Chrysostom stated¹²,

“Everywhere demons labor to drive men to dismay, and everywhere they rejoice in destruction. This, for instance, the devil did with respect to Job, and in that case too God allowed it, but neither in that case as complying with the devil, but willing to show His own servant more glorious, cutting off from the evil spirit all pretext for his shamelessness, and turning on his own head what was done against the righteous man. Here also the contrary of what the demons wished came to pass. For the power of Christ was gloriously proclaimed, and the wickedness of the demons, from which He delivered those possessed by them, was more plainly indicated. He demonstrated how they lack power to touch even swine, without permission from the God of all.”

John Chrysostom gives¹³ several reasons why Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine:

1. To teach those who are delivered from the wicked demons how great is the malice of the demons.
2. That all might learn how the demons are not even allowed to enter swine unless He should give them permission.
3. That the demons would have treated the two men worse than the swine, unless the two men, even in their calamity, had enjoyed much of God’s providential care. That the demons hate us more than beasts should be obvious to every man. Since the demons didn’t spare the swine, but in one moment of time threw them all down the precipice, much more would they have done to the two men whom they possessed. They would have led them towards the desert, carrying them away, unless the guardian care of God had been present, to curb and check the excess of their violence.

Cyril of Alexandria stated¹⁴ that this encounter with the Gergesene demoniacs illustrates Christ’s care for us in the face of forces that would easily overpower us.

“The herd of impure spirits asked for a herd of swine -- worthy of and like itself! And Christ purposely allowed them, though He well knew what they would do. And I can imagine someone saying, ‘Why did He grant their request?’ To which we answer, ‘He gave them the power, in order that this, like all His other conduct, might be a means of benefit to us, and inspire us with the hope of safety’. They asked for power over swine, plainly as something, which they do not possess. They would not have asked for it, if it had been in their power to take it without hindrance? But those who have no power over trifling and valueless things, how can they injure anyone of those whom Christ has sealed,

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 4.

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 4.

¹⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 8, Homily 44, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 193.

and who place their hope on Him? Comfort your heart; for perhaps you were terrified at hearing that a crowd of wicked spirits dwelt in one man, and made him wander among the graves of the dead in shame and nakedness, devoid of mind and understanding. Inasmuch as you too are a man exposed to temptations, you feared a similar misery, should Satan attack you. Have confidence in your heart; do not suppose that any such thing can happen while Christ surrounds us with protection and love. It is certain that they possess no power even over swine. So great is the providence which the Almighty Governor of our affairs bestows on us. For He even said to the Apostles, ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? Not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s will. And even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows’ (Matthew 10:29-31). For if He grants His protection on trifling and valueless things, how will He not consider us worthy of all regard, for whose sake He even became man, and endured the contempt of the Jews? Do not fear; for God helps and encircles with the armor of His good pleasure those whose wish it is to live for Him, and who seek to perform those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

John Chrysostom concurred¹⁵ to say that this illustrates God’s care for all men, even when they’re not expecting it, and even when they are in dire straits like the two demoniacs.

“We learn from this that His providence is not only over all in common, but also over each in particular. He also declared to His disciples, ‘But even the hairs of your head are numbered’ (Matthew 10:30). From these demoniacs, one may clearly perceive this; they would have been choked to death by the demons long before, if they had not enjoyed the benefit of much tender care from above.”

“For these reasons He allowed the demons to enter the herd of swine, that the Gadarenes, who dwelt in those places should learn His power. For where His name was great, He did not greatly display Himself. But where no one knew Him, but they were still in an insensible condition, He made His miracles to shine out, so as to bring them over to the knowledge of His Godhead. For it is evident from the event that the inhabitants of that city were a sort of senseless people; for when they ought to have adored and marveled at His power, they asked Him to leave.”

The Reaction from the Townsfolk

The reaction to all this by the herdsmen and the townsfolk is almost as strange as the demoniacs’ behavior. When the herdsmen brought the townsfolk out and they saw the former demoniacs clothed, in their right mind, and sitting at Jesus’ feet, they were afraid. When the herdsmen explained all that had happened, the townsfolk were seized with great fear and asked Jesus to leave. The demoniacs weren’t the only ones in the area that had problems.

The men who were healed wanted to return with Jesus and the Twelve to Nazareth. However, Jesus sent them back to their own house to “tell what great things God has done for you”. The two men proceeded to “proclaim in all Decapolis what Jesus had done for them and

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXVIII, 4.

all marveled” (Mark 5:20). Decapolis (Figure 1) is about 1,000 square miles; so they covered a lot of area with their testimony. The cities of Decapolis¹⁶ are shown in Table 1:

There may be a connection between these two healed demoniacs and the Apostle Paul. On the right hand side of the map, we note that Decapolis is in the country of the Nabateans, as is the city of Damascus. This area was referred to in the 1st Century as Arabia, as was generally everything to the East of the Jordan River.

Table 1
Cities of Decapolis

Scythopolis	Gergesa
Hippus	Dion
Gadara	Canatha (not shown)
Pella	Damascus
Philadelphia	Raphana (not shown)

There may be a connection between these two healed demoniacs and the Apostle Paul. On the right hand side of the map, we note that Decapolis is in the country of the Nabateans, as is the city of Damascus. This area was referred to in the 1st Century as Arabia, as was generally everything to the East of the Jordan River.

When the Apostle Paul was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3), he was led into the city and met the Prophet Ananias at the house of Judas on the street called Straight (Acts 9:11; this is the current location of the Patriarchate of the Church of Antioch). After his baptism, Paul went to Arabia (Galatians 1:17) and returned to Damascus. The place in Arabia he went is probably near Bostra and had been evangelized by the healed demoniacs back in 28 AD. Later on, Timon, of the Seventy and also of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:1-6) was Bishop of Bostra.

In relating all this to our lives today, we might ask whether all mental illness is actually demon possession, or whether only some of it is. Perhaps a larger question is whether all sickness is caused by demons. This certainly was the case for the Patriarch Job (Job 2:3-10), where Satan demanded the opportunity to inflict great misery on Job’s body to prove to God that Job wasn’t as righteous as God claimed he was. (Satan lost the argument, but Job spent a long time in great misery because of it – and was rewarded for his faithfulness). This was also the case of the woman with the back injury (Luke 13:10-17) “whom Satan had bound for 18 years.”

Cyril of Alexandria asked¹⁷ the question, “Why would the Lord permit demons to possess men like this?”

“The reason for these things is very deep; for so God is addressed by one of His saints, ‘Your judgments are a vast abyss’ (Psalm 35:6 LXX). We need to bear this in mind. The God of all purposely permits some to fall into the power of

¹⁶ Shown in Figure 1 are the traditional boundaries of Decapolis, where the cities in the table are those listed by Pliny, *Natural History*, V, 74. Damascus and Raphana are not within these traditional boundaries, and Ptolemy, *Geography*, V, xiv, 18, omits Raphana from the cities of Decapolis. Stephan of Byzantium, on the other hand, lists 14 cities within Decapolis.

¹⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Chapter 8, Homily 44, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 193-194.

demons, not so much that they may suffer, as that we may learn by their example in what way the demons treat us and so may avoid the desire of being subject to them. For by the suffering of one, many are edified.”

“Learning what happened to the herd of swine, we understand that wicked demons are cruel, hurtful and treacherous to those who are in their power. Proof of this comes from the fact that they hurried the swine over a precipice and drowned them in the waters. Christ, therefore, granted their request, that we might learn from what happened, that their disposition is ruthless and bestial, incapable of being softened, and solely intent on doing evil to those whom they can get into their power.”

“If, therefore, there is anyone among us wanton and swinish, filth loving and impure, and willingly contaminated with the abominations of sin, such a one by God's permission falls into their power, and sinks into the abyss of perdition. But it can never happen to those who love Christ, to become subject to them. Nor to us, as long as we walk in His footsteps, and, avoiding negligence in the performance of what is right, desire those things which are honorable, and belong to that virtuous and laudable conversation, which Christ has marked out for us by the precepts of the Gospel.”

During the 40 years Israel wandered in the wilderness, the Lord promised to remove sickness from their midst if they would only obey His voice (Exodus 23:22-26, Deuteronomy 7:12-15). If they didn't, He promised to bring the plagues and sicknesses that He brought on Egypt back on them (Deuteronomy 28:58-61). Similarly at the Lord's coming, there is no more death, sorrow, crying or pain (Revelation 21:4); these former things have passed away along with Satan (Revelation 20:10). It certainly seems like wherever Satan goes, misery, sickness and death follows. If one were to take away Satan, it would appear that sicknesses would go also. But then, what would be the role of the various strains of bacteria and viruses? At one time before the Fall, they had some good, useful purpose (Genesis 1:31). These are some good things to meditate on as we consider how great the Lord is and how much He's done for us.

The Cross Can Be Offensive

October 24, 2010

Sunday Before the Exaltation of the Cross

Revision G

Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18

Peter wrote to beware of “your adversary the devil, who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Do we ever wonder why? He’s been judged and outsmarted by the Cross and he knows his time is limited (Revelation 12:12). Is it any wonder then, that Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan and who were “enemies of the Cross of Christ”? (Philippians 3:18).

In today’s Epistle lesson, Paul addressed a situation where some Jewish Christians insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised (Galatians 6:12), even though James and the Apostles in Jerusalem had already written to all the Gentile churches that this wasn’t necessary (Acts 15:13-29). Why would they do this? Perhaps due to the strong influence worldwide of the Pharisees in Jerusalem who insisted on it. Paul said that they do this “only that they may not suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). Much of the persecution Paul experienced came at the hands of the Jewish leaders or was instigated by them. Thus these Jewish Christians Paul wrote about chose to offend God rather than men, and just to avoid taking up their cross.

Crucified to the World

Paul stated that he was “crucified to the world and the world to him” (Galatians 6:14). What he means by this is that he has abandoned all benefits of the life in the flesh, and looks forward to his proper life with the saints in heaven. This is not a boast on Paul’s part; it is a simple statement of where he has placed his hope.

Moses had recorded the Lord’s word as, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’, and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’, and Christ repeated the same thing¹⁹. The Patriarchs, who lived before Moses, knew this and followed the Lord’s direction without the need of written laws. When Christ came, He clarified what He had said to Moses and the Patriarchs. Throughout His three-year ministry, He repeatedly mentioned that the “Word of the Cross” was a way of life. For example, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). And again, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27, Mark 8:34). What does this mean?

John Chrysostom considered²⁰ what were the implications when Paul said, ‘I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me’. Simply put, Paul’s life in the flesh was an altered one, and he was hastening on to another life.

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¹⁹ Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, III, v. 21.

“The word ‘life’ is very significant as is the word ‘death’. There is this life of the body, there is the life of sin (Romans 6:2). On one hand, it is possible to live the life of sin. On the other hand, there is the life everlasting and immortal, ‘for our citizenship is in heaven’ (Philippians in 20). There is also the life of the body of which he speaks, ‘through Him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). Paul acknowledges that he lives the natural life, but denies the life of sin, which other men live. He who does not desire the present life, who is hastening to another life, who despises death, and who desires nothing, how does he live this life? For as one made of adamant²¹, though he were struck a thousand blows, would never be bothered by it. It is no longer the old man; as he said, ‘Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death!’ (Romans 7:24) How does he live who does nothing for the sake of food, clothing, or for any of these present things? Such a one does not live the natural life; if he takes no thought for the things, which sustain life, he does not live it. Paul did not live it; he busied himself with none of the things of this life”.

“Paul shows that he accepts the natural life. ‘The life which I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). That is, I live a certain new life, an altered one. Think not that I shall be deprived of this life, for neither while alive did I live this life, but that which Christ willed. For tell me, he who despises money, luxury, hunger, thirst, dangers, health, safety, does he live this life? He who has nothing here, and is oftentimes willing to cast life away, if need be, and does not cling to it, does he live this life? By no means! Consider an example. Let us imagine someone with great wealth, with many servants, and much gold, but who makes no use of all these things. Is such a person rich for all his wealth? No! Let him see his children dissipating his property, strolling idly about; let him feel no concern for them. When beaten let him not even think about the pain. Shall we call him a man of wealth? By no means, even though his wealth is his own. ‘To me to live is Christ’; if you will inquire into my life, it is He. ‘And to die is gain’ (Philippians 1:21). Why? Because I shall more clearly be present with Him; so that my death is rather a coming to life! They who kill me will work on me no dreadful thing, they will only send me onward to my proper life, and free me from that which is not mine”.

Chrysostom also compared²² the Christian life to birds soaring too high to be trapped by fowlers. Birds are easily caught in nets when they fly low, where the devil is a fowler with nets to ensnare Christians in the things of this world.

“Often a wife, children, friend, neighbor have proved a snare to the unheeding! And why, it is asked, are there so many snares? That we may not fly low, but seek the things that are above. For just as birds, as long as they stay in the upper air, are not easily caught; so also you, as long as you look to things above, will not be easily captured, whether by a snare, or by any other device. The devil is a fowler. Soar, then, too high for his arrows. The man who has mounted aloft will no longer admire anything in the affairs of this life. But when we have ascended to the top of the mountains, the city and its walls seem to us to

²¹ Adamant was a very hard legendary material, possible associated with diamond.

²² John Chrysostom, The Homilies on the Statutes, XV, 8.

be small, and the men appear to us to be going along upon the earth like ants. So when you have ascended to the heights of spiritual wisdom, nothing upon the earth will be able to fascinate you. Everything, even riches, glory, honor, and whatever else there be of that kind, will appear insignificant when you regard heavenly things. According to Paul all the glories of the present life appeared trifling, and more unprofitable than dead things. Therefore his exclamation, ‘The world is crucified to me’ (Galatians 6:14). Therefore also his admonition, ‘Set your affections on things above’. That is, ‘Where Christ sits at the right hand of God’” (Colossians 3:1).

Chrysostom, referring to the saints and prophets who wandered about and of whom the world was not worthy (Hebrews 11:37-38), compared²³ their situation to that of people in his day. The saints were citizens of heaven but many people of his day were unwilling to be separated from the things on earth.

“The saints and prophets called themselves therefore ‘strangers’; but Paul went beyond this. Not merely did he call himself a stranger to this world, but said that he was dead to the world, and that the world was dead to him. ‘For the world has been crucified to me and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). But we busy ourselves about everything here in this world as active citizens. And what righteous men were to the world, i.e. as ‘strangers’ and ‘dead’, that we are to Heaven. And what they were to Heaven, i.e. as active citizens, that we are to the world. Therefore we are dead, because we have refused that which is truly life, and have chosen this, which is transitory. We have provoked God to wrath, because when the enjoyments of Heaven have been set before us, we are not willing to be separated from things on earth. Like worms, we turn about from the earth to the earth. In short, we are not willing to look up even for a little while, nor to withdraw ourselves from human affairs, but as if drowned in sleep and drunkenness, we are stupefied with imaginary things”.

Gregory of Nyssa, speaking of Paul’s words, “As many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death” (Romans 6:3), compared²⁴ our life to that of a corpse. Just as a corpse does not seek the things of this life, so should we be.

“Now if we have been conformed to His death, sin from now on in us is surely a corpse, pierced through by the javelin of Baptism, as that fornicator was thrust through by the zealous Phinehas (Numbers 25:6-8). Flee therefore from us, ill-omened one! It is a corpse you seek to destroy, one long ago joined to you, one who long since lost his senses for pleasures. A corpse is not attracted to beautiful bodies, or captivated by wealth. A corpse does not slander and lie, snatch at what is not its own, or revile those who encounter it. My way of living is regulated for another life. I have learned to despise the things that are in the world, to pass by the things of earth, to hasten to the things of heaven, even as Paul expressly testifies, that the world is crucified to him, and he to the world (Galatians 6:14). These are the words of a soul truly regenerated. These are the utterances of the newly-baptized man, who remembers his own profession, which

²³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXIV, 1.

²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Baptism of Christ, A Sermon for the Day of the Lights”, in *Oratorical Works*, V.

he made to God when the sacrament was administered to him, promising for the sake of love towards Him that he would despise all torment and all pleasure alike”.

Clement of Alexandria stated²⁵ that death should be a freeing of the soul to a better life with God. Many times, however, death is only a strengthening of the chains that tie a person to the body and judgment.

“‘Death’ is the result of fellowship of the soul, in a state of sin, with the body; and ‘life’ the result of separation from sin. Many are the stakes and ditches of lust, which impede us, and the pits of wrath and anger, which must be leaped over. We must avoid many machinations of those who plot against us, who would no longer see the knowledge of God ‘through a mirror’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). The Scripture views as slaves those ‘under sin’ and ‘sold to sin’ (Romans 6:6-20), the lovers of pleasure and of the body. They are beasts rather than men, ‘those who have become like cattle and horses, neighing after their neighbors’ wives’ (Jeremiah 5:8). The licentious is ‘the lustful ass’, the covetous is the ‘savage wolf’, and the deceiver is ‘a serpent’. The severance, therefore, of the soul from the body, made a life-long study, produces a cheerful readiness in the Christian, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of the chains, which bind the soul to the body. ‘For the world is crucified to me, and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14), the Apostle says; ‘and now I live, though in the flesh, as having my conversation in heaven’ (Philippians 3:20).

Boasting or Glorifying in the Cross

Paul also spoke of boasting in the Cross (Galatians 6:14). This can be done simply by displaying the Cross in our homes and altars, by venerating the Cross in Church and by making the sign of the Cross. Chrysostom expressed²⁶ another aspect:

“And what is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me, the slave, the enemy, the ungrateful one; He even so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. What can be comparable to this! Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable tenderness; He was not ashamed of being crucified for our sake, and will we be ashamed to confess His infinite solicitude?”

Chrysostom also stated²⁷ that we have spectators in heaven, and we should be careful not to provoke the Master. Praise and flattery from those at enmity with God is like the taunts of children at play. The only thing worthy of glory is humility.

“It is then a sad thing, and replete with disgrace of every kind, to be in love with glory in civil matters. But when in spiritual things you are in the same plight, what excuse is there for you, when you do not give God even as much honor as you get yourself from your servants? For even the slave ‘looks to the eyes of his master’ (Psalm 123:2), and the hireling to his employer, who is to pay him wages, and the disciple to his master. But you do just the contrary. Having

²⁵ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 3.

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, chapter 6.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, v. 1.

left the God that hired you, you look to your fellow servants; and this knowing that God remembers your well doings even after this life, but man only remembers the present. And when you have spectators assembled in Heaven, you are gathering together spectators upon earth. And where the wrestler struggles, there he wants to be honored; but while your wrestling is above, you are anxious to gain a crown below. And what can be worse than madness like this?"

"But let us look at the crowns also. For one is formed by haughtiness and a second by grudging against another, and a third by flattery, another by wealth, and another by servile obedience. Like children at their childish play put crowns of grass upon one another, and many a time laugh at him that is crowned behind his back. They that pass their praises upon you, many a time joke by themselves at their putting the grass upon us. How many would you have to praise you; ten thousand? These are no better than so many crows cawing from the sky. Taking the assembly of the angels into consideration, these will seem viler than worms and their good word no better than a cobweb".

"Hear then how Paul, who saw through these things thoroughly, is so far from seeking after them, that he even belittles them, in the words 'But God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of Christ' (Galatians 6:14). This glory let us emulate, that we may not provoke the Master, because in seeking worldly glory we are insulting God, and not our self. For if you were a painter, and had some pupil, and he were to omit showing you his practice of the art, but set forth his painting publicly just to anybody that chanced to observe it, you would not take it quietly. But if this with your fellow servants was an insult, how much more with the Master! Remember to say to your soul as Paul did, 'Do you not know that we shall judge angels?' (1 Corinthians 6:3) You that judge the angels, will you let yourself be judged by off scourging, and be praised by dancers, mimics, gladiators and horse-drivers?"

Chrysostom went on²⁸ to compare the lust of unbelievers for their passions to the love of a believer for his God. Each seeks a kind of glory, one temporary the other eternal.

"Those who cherish earthly passion, which men call love, think nothing glorious or precious, but concentrate on those things which tend to gratify their lust. Their mistress is everything to them. Much more do those, who have been taken captive by this heavenly love, think nothing of the cost. For if anyone is caught with the fire of Christ's love, he becomes like a man who dwelt alone on the earth, so utterly does he care less for glory or disgrace. As for trials, he so despises them, both scourges and imprisonments, as though the body in which he suffers these things were another's and not his own, or as though he had a body made of adamant. As for the sweet things of this life, he so laughs them to scorn, is so insensitive to them, as we are insensitive to dead bodies, being ourselves dead. He is as far from being taken captive by any passion, as the gold refined in the fire and purified is free from alloy. For even as flies would not dart into the midst of a flame, but fly from it, so the passions dare not even to come near this man".

"Take the Apostle Paul as an example. Observe how he felt towards the whole world. 'The world is crucified to me and I unto the world' (Galatians

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, LII, 25:23.

6:14). ‘I am dead to the world, and the world is dead to me’. And again, ‘It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me’” (Philippians 2:20).

Enemies of the Cross

Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan and who were “enemies of the Cross of Christ”? (Philippians 3:18). John Chrysostom endeavored to define²⁹ what Paul meant by “Enemies of the Cross”. By seeking the comforts and pleasures of this world, making a pretense of Christianity and refusing to acknowledge the Cross, people become enemies of the Cross.

“Nothing is so incongruous in a Christian, and foreign to his character, as to seek ease and rest; to be engrossed with the present life is foreign to our profession and enlistment. Your Master was crucified, and do you seek ease? Your Master was pierced with nails, and do you live delicately? Do these things become a noble soldier? Paul said, ‘Many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Philippians 3:18). There were some, who made a pretense of Christianity, yet lived in ease and luxury, and this is contrary to the Cross; therefore he thus spoke. The cross belongs to a soul at its post for the fight, seeking nothing like ease, while their conduct is of the contrary sort. So that even if they say, they are Christ’s, still they are, as it were, enemies of the Cross. If they loved the Cross, they would strive to live the crucified life. Crucify yourself, not that you may slay yourself, God forbid, for that is a wicked thing, but as Paul said, ‘The world has been crucified to me and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). If you love your Master, die to the things of this world like He did”.

“Learn how great is the power of the Cross; how many good things it has achieved, and does still; how it is the safety of our life; through it everything is done. Baptism is through the Cross, for we must receive that seal. The laying on of hands is through the Cross. If we are on journeys, if we are at home, wherever we are, the Cross is a great good, the armor of salvation, a shield that cannot be beaten down, a weapon to oppose the devil. You bear the Cross, when you are at enmity with the devil, not simply when you seal yourself by it, but when you suffer the things belonging to the Cross. Christ thought fit to call our sufferings by the name of the Cross. As when he said, ‘Except a man take up his cross and follow Me’ (Matthew 16:24), i.e. except he be prepared to die”.

“But these who are engrossed with the present life, and lovers of their bodies, are enemies of the Cross. And everyone, who is a friend of luxury, and of present safety, is an enemy of that Cross in which Paul makes his boast, which he embraces, with which he desires to be incorporated. As when he said, ‘I am crucified to the world, and the world to me’ (Galatians 6:14). But here he said, ‘I now tell you weeping’ (Philippians 3:18). Why? The evil was urgent, and it deserved tears. Truthfully, the luxurious are worthy of tears, who fatten the body, and take no thought of that soul which must give account. Behold you live delicately, behold you are drunken, today and tomorrow, ten years, twenty, thirty, fifty. What is the end? What is the gain? Nothing at all! Does it not then deserve tears, and lamentations, to lead such a life? God has brought us into this course, that He may crown us, and we take our departure without doing any noble

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XIII.

action. Therefore Paul weeps, where others laugh, and live in pleasure. So sympathetic is he; he takes thought for all men. ‘Whose God is the belly’ (Philippians 3:19). For this they have a God! That is, ‘let us eat and drink!’ (1 Corinthians 15:32, Isaiah 22:13) Do you see, how great an evil luxury is? To some their wealth, and to others their belly is a God. Are not these too idolaters, and worse than the common? And their ‘glory is in their shame’” (1 Corinthians 15:32).

To get a better insight into this, it is helpful to understand the reference to the “needle’s eye gate” of many ancient cities. The “needle’s eye gate” was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus³⁰. A man could fit easily through the “needle’s eye gate”, but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel’s pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the “needle’s eye gate.”

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

This does not mean that no Christian can be rich. The Patriarch Job was very wealthy (Job 1:1-3, 42:12-17), yet the Lord referred to him as a blameless and upright man who had no peers in his righteousness (Job 1:8, 2:3). The key here is discerning the deceitfulness of wealth and the strength of its pull on one’s heart. Job was able to let his pack be taken off without remorse. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (Job 1:21; also Job 2:9-10). Many Christians throughout the ages have been unable or unwilling to continue fighting this pull and have taken oaths of poverty to thrust a sword (so to speak) into the heart of the demon of wealth.

Chrysostom marveled³¹ and was humbled not at the miracles performed by the Apostle Paul, but by the chains and abuse he endured. Here was a man who performed incredible miracles everywhere he went, yet he was chained up like a common criminal, because of the urging of his enemies. Did these “enemies of the Cross”, that he dealt with, have any idea who Paul was? When Paul is honored at the Resurrection, and their deeds are reviewed, there may be some embarrassment on their part.

“Oh! Those blessed hands, which that chain adorned! Not so worthy were Paul’s hands when they lifted up and raised the lame man at Lystra (Acts 14:10), as when they were bound with those chains (Acts 28:20). Do you marvel at Paul, when the viper fastened on his hand, and did him no harm? (Acts 28:3) Don’t marvel; it revered his chain. The whole sea revered it also; for then

³⁰ Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, pp. 24-25.

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, v. 4:1.

too was he bound, when he was saved from shipwreck (Acts 27:13-44). Were any one to grant me power to raise the dead at this moment, I would not choose that power, but this chain. If I were free from the cares of the Church, if my body was strong and vigorous, I would not shrink from undertaking so long a journey, only for the sake of beholding those chains, for the sake of seeing the prison where he was bound. The traces indeed of his miracles are numerous in all parts of the world, yet they are not so dear as those of his scars (Galatians 6:17). In the Scriptures, he does not delight me as much when he is working miracles, as when he is suffering evil, being scourged, and dragged about. From his body were carried away handkerchiefs or aprons to use to heal the sick (Acts 19:12). Marvelous, truly marvelous, are these things, and yet not so marvelous as ‘When they had laid many stripes upon him, they cast him into prison’ (Acts 16:23). And again; being in bonds, ‘they were singing hymns to God’ (Acts 16:25). And again, ‘They stoned him, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead’” (Acts 14:19).

“Do you know how mighty a thing an iron chain is for Christ’s sake, bound about His servant’s body? Listen to what Christ Himself said, ‘Blessed are you’ (Matthew 5:11). Why? When you raise the dead? No! When you shall heal the blind? Not at all! ‘When men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake’ (Matthew 5:11). Now, if being spoken evil of (i.e. only words) renders men blessed, what may being treated as evil (i.e. deeds also) achieve? Listen to what Paul himself said elsewhere, ‘Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness’ (2 Timothy 4:8). Yet more glorious than this crown is the chain; of this, Paul said, the Lord will count me worthy, and I am not inquisitive about those things. Enough it is for me to suffer evil for Christ’s sake. Let Him but grant me to say, that ‘I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ’ (Colossians 1:24), and I ask nothing further”.

John Chrysostom continued to say³² that we are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them, even if they are enemies of the Cross. But there comes a time, after they have rejected us repeatedly, that their blood is on their own heads.

“Let us be ashamed, who though we have no preaching to occupy us, live in idleness. ‘And he disputed in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks’; but ‘when they opposed and blasphemed’ (Acts 18:4-6), he withdrew, by this expecting to draw them more. Why, having left that house, did he come to live next door to the synagogue? (Acts 18:7) Was it not for this? For it was not that he saw any danger here. But Paul having testified to them — not teaching now, but testifying — ‘having shaken his garments’, to terrify them not by word only but by action, said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads’ (Acts 18:6). He spoke more vehemently as having already persuaded many. ‘I am clean’. Thus we also are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them. ‘From this time forth I will go to the Gentiles’. So also when he says, ‘Henceforth let no man trouble me’ (Galatians 6:17), he says it to terrify. The punishment of Paul’s abandoning them did not terrify them, but it did sting them”.

³² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXIX, v. 18:4-7.

Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:44-48).

Offense of the Cross

Paul’s preaching of the Cross offended some people, and Paul was persecuted as a result (Galatians 5:11). Chrysostom also spoke³³ on the offense of the Cross. Jews demand a sign in the form of miracles, but the answer is the Cross; Greeks demand eloquent teaching, but the answer is again the Cross. By contraries, God has overcome, and by the things that offend people, He attracts to Himself those who are able to see beyond the first impression.

“Vast is the import of the things here spoken! For he means to say how by contraries God has overcome, and how the Gospel is not of man. What he says is something of this sort. When we say unto the Jews, ‘Believe’, they answer, ‘Raise the dead, heal the demoniacs, show us signs.’ But instead what do we say? That He was crucified, and died, who is preached. And this is enough, not only to fail in drawing over the unwilling, but even to drive away those who are willing. Nevertheless, it does not drive away, but attracts and holds and overcomes”.

“Again; the Greeks demand of us a rhetorical style, and the acuteness of sophistry. But we preach to these also the Cross: and that which, in the case of the Jews seemed to be weakness, this in the case of the Greeks is foolishness. We not only fail in producing what they demand, but also produce the very opposites of their demand. For the Cross is not a sign sought out by reasoning, but the opposite. It is not a proof of power, but a conviction of weakness; not a display of wisdom, but a suggestion of foolishness. They who seek for signs and wisdom not only don’t receive the things, which they ask, but hear the contrary to what they desire. And then, by means of contraries, they are persuaded; how is not the power of Him that is preached unspeakable? As if to someone tempest-tossed and longing for a haven, you were to show not a haven but another wilder portion of the sea, and so could make him follow with thankfulness? Or as if a physician could attract to himself the man that was wounded and in need of remedies, by promising to cure him not with drugs, but with burning him again! For this is a result of great power indeed. So also the Apostles prevailed, not simply without a sign, but by a thing, which seemed contrary to all the known signs. Which thing also Christ did in the case of the blind man. For when He healed him, He took away the blindness by a thing that increased it: i.e., He put on clay (John 9:6). Just as by means of clay He healed the blind man, so also by means of the Cross He brought the world to Himself. That certainly was adding an offense not taking an offense away. By means of the prophets again with a small piece of wood He raised up iron from the bottom of the river (2 Kings 6:5-7). In like manner also with the Cross He has drawn the world to Himself. You see now, it is proof of

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 5.

great power and wisdom, to convince by means of the things that speak directly against us. Thus the Cross seems to be matter of offense; and yet far from offending, it even attracts”.

Conclusion of the Word of the Cross, Part I

We have considered the first aspect of the Word of the Cross: the lifting up of the Son of Man and several aspects of the effects of the Cross. This was a mystery: announced by the Prophets, announced by Jesus as His reason for becoming incarnate, but yet Satan considered it foolishness. At His crucifixion, all of creation groaned. As a result of His passion:

- Much grain was produced -- the Holy Spirit in us.
- The world was judged along with its ruler (Satan).
- The world was reconciled to Christ.
- The Cross was established as a new standard, clarifying the words in the Mosaic Law regarding loving God and our neighbor.

Jesus may have been humiliated in the eyes of the world, but He suffered no permanent harm and accomplished quite a lot! On the Sunday after the Exaltation, we will see how we are to do the same and how we incur no permanent harm either.