

Holy Wednesday Bridegroom Matins

Jesus Glorified by the Cross

March 31, 2010

Revision B

Gospel: John 12:17-50

The Reaction of the Pharisees to Palm Sunday: John 12:17-19

In describing the events of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week, the Apostle John gives less space to these events than the other Gospel writers, and he leaves out a lot of details that the other writers covered. Instead, he focuses on the spiritual climate that led up to the Last Supper and the Passover meal on Thursday evening.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus was proclaimed to be the Messiah by everyone in Jerusalem. A great multitude greeted Him as He rode into Jerusalem, saying, “Hosanna! Blessed is He, Who comes in the Name of the Lord! The King of Israel!” (John 12:13) Shortly before that, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Since Lazarus was a wealthy and prominent man, this created a spectacle, where people came to see Lazarus also. Lazarus was so prominent, in fact, that the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus (John 12:9-11).

The chief priests and Pharisees had no understanding of what Jesus was doing. They were aware of revolutionaries in the past, which staged a rebellion and were suppressed by the Romans. For example, Theudas and Judas of Galilee had done this in the days of the census by Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-3). But they were suppressed and their followers were scattered (Acts 5:36-37). The chief priests and Pharisees thought Jesus was just like the previous false messiahs (John 11:48-50, Acts 5:38-39), and they were worried about Roman intervention.

Following Palm Sunday, their concern became much more acute. Jesus’ followers now were not just 400 or so as was the case with Theudas (Acts 5:36). There were hundreds of thousands involved now! The Pharisees remarked among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!” (John 12:19)

John Chrysostom stated¹ that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, who were secret followers of Jesus, made this remark to their fellow Pharisees (John 19:38-40).

“Now this seems to me to be said by those who felt rightly, but had not courage to speak boldly, and who then would restrain the others by pointing to the result, as though they were attempting impossibilities. Here again they call the multitude ‘the world’”.

Another event occurred following Palm Sunday that exacerbated the situation. Following His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus went straight to the Temple and drove out the moneychangers and those who sold doves saying, “My house shall be called a

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

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house of prayer for all nations! But you have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:15-17). These people were there at the Temple because of the Lord’s command for all Jewish men to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year at the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16-17). The pilgrims were to bring their tithes with them and rejoice before the Lord with their household. If they came from a great distance and couldn’t bring the tithe of their livestock, they were to convert it to money before they came and spend the money in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). The moneychangers served as the foreign currency exchange for all the people from distant countries. But it was more than just that. Foreign money could not be used to buy any animal sacrifices; one had to use the shekel of the sanctuary (Leviticus 5:15). In addition, there was the “temple tax” (Exodus 30:11-16) that Jesus paid even though He didn’t have to (Matthew 17:24-27). This “temple tax” was required from foreigners -- payable in shekels of the sanctuary -- before they could bring any offering forward. And the moneychangers could charge anything they saw proper to perform this “service”.

The Mosaic Law, however, strictly forbade making profits off people trying to be godly. For example, the Mosaic Law specified that if a citizen of Israel or a foreign visitor were to become poor, he was to be supported and no interest charged (Leviticus 25:35-37). This became a big issue during Nehemiah’s time and Nehemiah extracted an oath from the priests that they would refrain from any interest or markup charged against their brothers during a famine (Nehemiah 5:1-13). Following the cleansing of the temple (where Jesus would not allow any vendors to hawk their wares in the temple, Mark 11:16), Jesus left the city for the night to frustrate nighttime assassination attempts by the scribes and chief priests (Mark 11:18-19).

Just as zeal for the Lord’s house consumed David (Psalm 69:9), so it did Jesus (John 2:17) in throwing out the money-changers *twice*. The first time occurred around Passover, 27 AD (John 2:14-17), where Jesus made a whip out of leather cords and physically drove the money-changers out. The second time occurred around Passover, 30 AD, during Holy Week,

just before the Crucifixion (Matthew 21:12-15, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-46), and this time, no whip is mentioned.

Theophylact stated that one aspect of the “den of thieves” was making a profit by selling off the animals that were offered for sacrifice. This was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law, which specified that the offering is holy and that the priests that offered the sacrifice must consume it in a holy place (Leviticus 6:25-26). Theophylact also applied this to the Church in his day.

“It is possible that we ourselves may be cast out of the Temple. There are many of us who go into our own Temples and sell what is good and buy worse. There are others who have tables full of coins; that is, those who manage and administer the affairs of the Church, but who do everything for the sake of profit.”

John Chrysostom noted² that Jesus was proclaimed as God, both by the multitudes, by the prophets and by the children. But the chief priests and the Scribes were indignant.

“They were not persuaded, but ‘were indignant’ (Matthew 21:15), even while they heard the prophet crying aloud (Psalm 8:2, 118:26), and the children in a manner beyond their age proclaiming Him. He Himself sets up Isaiah against them as an accuser, saying, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’” (Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11).

“Not in this way only does He show His authority, but also by His healing diverse infirmities. ‘For the blind and the lame came unto Him, and He healed them’ (Matthew 21:14), and His power and authority He indicates. But they would not even be persuaded, but together with the rest of the miracles, hearing even the children proclaiming, were ready to choke. They said, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ (Matthew 21:16); for the children were singing to Him as to God”.

Gentiles Ask to See Jesus: John 12:20-22

“Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’. Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus. Jesus was aware regarding whom the visitors were and where they were from, and that they wanted Jesus to come with them to heal their king. Jesus couldn’t go; therefore He answered them, saying, ‘The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified’” (John 12:20-23).

Moses of Chorene stated³ that these Greeks were from Edessa in Mesopotamia. Abgar, king of Edessa, who requested that Jesus come to heal him of his leprosy, had sent them. Jesus’ fame had gone throughout all Syria, and Gentiles had been coming to him from places distant from Judea (Matthew 4:24-25). Others, such as Clement of Alexandria, concurred and stated⁴ that these “Greeks” were not Hellenic Jews, but were from somewhere quite a bit more remote. In a similar fashion, people had come from Mesopotamia and points even farther distant from Jerusalem to attend the Pentecost celebration where the Holy Spirit was given (Acts 2:9).

² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 1.

³ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Moses of Chorene: The History of Armenia”, 6, Ancient Syriac Documents, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

⁴ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, II, Elucidations, i.

Following the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostle Thomas sent Thaddaeus of the Seventy to heal Abgar and to evangelize the area around Edessa.

According to tradition⁵, the courier, Ananias, that brought Abgar's request to Jesus, was a painter. Abgar had instructed him that if Jesus could not come to heal him, he was to paint an icon of Jesus. Abgar believed that the portrait would heal him. Aware of this, Jesus took a napkin and wiped His face with it, leaving a perfect impression of His face on the napkin. Jesus then gave this napkin to Ananias, with a message to say that he would be healed partially by it. Later He would send him an envoy, who would rid him of the remainder of the disease. Receiving the napkin, Abgar kissed it and most of the leprosy fell from his body, with a little remaining on his face. When Thaddaeus, of the Seventy, came, he completed the job.

In later centuries, this napkin was framed and placed above the city gate of Edessa. This napkin came to be referred to as 'The Icon of our Lord Jesus Christ Not-Made-With-Hands', and this icon has its own Feast Day in the Church on August 16th to commemorate the events associated with this miraculous icon. When Abgar's great grandsons restored idolatry, the Bishop of Edessa came by night and walled in the icon above the city gate to prevent its destruction. Succeeding generations forgot that the icon was there. During the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565 AD), when the Persians attacked Edessa, the Bishop of Edessa, Eulabius, had a vision from the Virgin Mary about the secret of the icon, and retrieved it. The icon was later destroyed during the Islamic Conquests.

The courier, Ananias, brought Abgar's request to Jesus in a letter, where Abgar requested⁶ the following:

"Abgar, son of Archam, prince of the land, to Jesus, Savior and Benefactor of men, who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem, greeting. I have heard of You, and of the cures done by Your hands, without remedies, without herbs. For, as it is said, You make the blind to see, the lame to walk, the lepers to be healed; You drive out unclean spirits, You cure unhappy beings afflicted with prolonged and inveterate diseases; You even raise the dead. As I have heard of all these wonders wrought by You, I have concluded from them either that You are God, come down from heaven to do such great things, or that You are the Son of God, working as You do these miracles. Therefore I have written to You, praying You to condescend to come to me and cure me of the ills with which I am afflicted. I have heard also that the Jews murmur against You and wish to deliver You up to torments. I have a city small but pleasant; it would be sufficient for us both."

"The messengers, the bearers of this letter, met Jesus at Jerusalem, a fact confirmed by these words of the Gospel. 'Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus'. Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus' (John 12:20-22). Jesus did not then accept the invitation given to Him, but He thought fit to honor Abgar with an answer⁷ in these words:

⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, *Prologue From Ochrid*, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, August 16.

⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "Moses of Chorene: The History of Armenia", 6, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "Moses of Chorene: The History of Armenia", 7, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

“Blessed is he who believes in Me without having seen Me! For it is written⁸ of Me, ‘Those who see Me will not believe in Me, and those who do not see Me will believe and live’”.

“As to what you have written asking Me to come to you, I must accomplish here all that for which I have been sent; and when I shall have accomplished it all, I shall ascend to Him who sent Me. When I shall go away I will send one of my disciples, who will cure your diseases, and give life to you and to all those who are with you’. Ananias, Abgar’s courier, brought him this word, as well as the portrait of the Savior⁹, a picture which is still to be found at this day in the city of Edessa”.

The Father Speaks From Heaven: John 12:23-29

In His answer to the Gentiles from Edessa, the emissaries who had been sent by King Abgar, Jesus said:

“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name” (John 12:23-28).

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again”. Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him”. Jesus answered and said, “This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake” (John 12:28-30). This was a rather impressive display of Jesus’ power and His connection with His Father that He gave for the visitors from Mesopotamia. When Ananias, the emissary, returned to King Abgar and healed him partly of his leprosy with “The Icon of our Lord Jesus Christ Not-Made-With-Hands”, they were absolutely convinced that they had found the Truth.

John Chrysostom pointed out¹⁰ that Jesus’ humanity is evident when He said, “Now My soul is troubled”

“Although My trouble urges Me to say this, yet I say the opposite, ‘Glorify Your Name’; that is, lead Me now to the Cross. This greatly shows His humanity, and a nature unwilling to die, but clinging to the present life, proving that He was not exempt from human feelings. As it is no blame to be hungry, or to sleep, so neither is it to desire the present life; and Christ indeed had a body pure from sin, yet not free from natural wants, for then it would not have been a body. By these words He also taught something else; namely, if we are ever in agony and dread, and we don’t shrink back from that which is set before us. By

⁸ Where this is written is not known.

⁹ This portrait is called “The Icon of Christ Made Without Hands”, which Jesus made by pressing his face against a cloth. This icon is so famous that it has its own Feast Day, August 16th, to commemorate its spectacular history.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVII, 2.

saying, 'Glorify Your Name', He shows that He dies for the truth calling the action, 'glory to God'. This fell out after the Crucifixion. The world was about to be converted, to acknowledge the Name of God, and to serve Him, not the Name of the Father only, but also that of the Son; yet still as to this He is silent. 'There came therefore a Voice from Heaven, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again'. When had He 'glorified it?' By what had been done before; and 'I will glorify it again' after the Cross".

A Grain of Wheat in Mesopotamia

The visitors from Mesopotamia undoubtedly stayed in Jerusalem throughout the Days of Unleavened Bread, which ended five days after the Resurrection, but they probably returned prior to Pentecost. Thus they experienced the euphoria of the Resurrection, but they missed out on the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and had to wait until the Apostles came to visit them.

The message that they took back with them was very profound, and this would have a tremendous effect on all the countries surrounding Edessa¹¹. The message was, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain". This is completely contrary to worldly logic; to the world it is utter foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-20). Crucifixion in the 1st Century Roman world meant utter humiliation; this is especially so in Jesus' case. Consider the crown of thorns, the robe, the reed, the punches, the slapping on the face, the spitting, the unjust "trial", the irony, the nails, the nakedness, the spear, etc. Yet the Scriptures speak of the crucifixion as being Jesus' glorification (John 12:23-24). This is 180 degrees different from most peoples' thinking, and even Satan in all his wisdom misunderstood this (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

The illustration here is the germination of a seed that is planted. Once in the ground, the seed itself contains enough to get the plant started. But once the roots of the plant get established, the seed dies and is dwarfed by the plant. And many kernels of wheat -- each of which is another seed -- are produced on the stalk of the plant, where each new seed contains the same life as the original seed. If the seed never dies, it never germinates and the plant doesn't grow. The seed just remains alone as a seed.

John Chrysostom compared¹² the Resurrection to the daily germination of seeds, plants and human reproduction:

"What sort of excuse will they have who disbelieve the Resurrection, when the action is practiced each day, in seeds, in plants, and in the case of our own generation? First it is necessary that the seed die, and then the generation takes place. But when God does anything, reasoning is of no use; for how did He make us out of those things that were not? This I say to Christians, who assert that they believe the Scriptures; but I shall also say something else drawn from human reasoning. Of men some live in vice, others in virtue; and of those who live in vice, many have attained to extreme old age in prosperity, many of the virtuous after enduring the contrary. When then shall each receive his deserts? At what season? Hear Paul saying, 'This corruptible must put on incorruption' (1 Corinthians 15:53). He speaks not of the soul, for the soul is not corrupted; moreover, 'resurrection' is said of that which fell, and that which fell was the

¹¹ For details, see Mark Kern, *The Apostle Jude*, St. Athanasius Press, 2002, pp. 8-19.

¹² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, LXVI, 3.

body. But why will some have it that there is no resurrection of the body? Is it not possible with God? Why is it unpopular to consider that the corruptible, which shared the toil and death, should share also the crowns? If it was inappropriate, it would not have been created at the beginning and Christ would not have taken flesh. But to show that He took it and raised it up, hear what He said, ‘Reach here your fingers’ (John 20:27); and, ‘Behold, a spirit has not bones and flesh’” (Luke 24:39).

Rivers of Living Water

In connection with this, John recorded Jesus’ announcement at the Feast of Tabernacles: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Then John remarks: “This He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). It was for this purpose that Jesus came to the hour of His Crucifixion (John 12:27). He bought with a price those who had fallen, and made their body a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The new kernels of wheat now have the same life as the original seed, and this has been given as a down payment of the full reward (2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:14).

If we take up our cross and “lose our life”, we save it; if we don’t, we lose it. Avoiding the call to take up our cross, we make ourselves not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:38) and we forfeit being His disciple (Luke 14:27). This does not mean we have to go on some dramatic suicide mission to “lose our life” for the Lord. Rather we lose it by saying in the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

John Chrysostom stated¹³ that the Lord does not force us to take up our Cross, but He presents it as an attraction for our benefit

“I do not force, I do not compel, but each one I make lord of his own choice. Wherefore I say, ‘If any man *desires* to come after me’. For to good things do I call you, not to things evil or burdensome; not to punishment and vengeance that I should have to compel. No! The nature of the thing alone is sufficient to attract you. For you ought not, O Peter, because you have confessed Me Son of God, therefore only to expect crowns (Cf. Mark 8:29), and to suppose this enough for your salvation, and for the future to enjoy security, as having done all. For although it is in My power, as Son of God, to hinder you from having any trial at all of those hardships, yet such is not My will for your sake, that you may yourself contribute something, and be more approved”.

The Lord had said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). What does it mean to deny oneself? John Chrysostom compared¹⁴ that to denying someone else:

“What then is it to deny another? He that is denying another, should he see him either beaten, or bound, or led to execution, or whatever he may suffer, does not stand by him, does not help him, is not moved, feels nothing for him, as being once for all alienated from him. Thus then, He will have us disregard our own body, so that whether men scourge or banish or burn or whatever they do, let

¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LV, 1.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LV, 2.

him have nothing to do with himself, and let him so feel as though another were suffering it all”.

The Cross is the ultimate act of the love of God for man (John 3:14-16). As we show love in humility to fellow members of the body of Christ, we take up our crosses also. Jesus was highly exalted because He took up His Cross (Philippians 2:5-9), so we shall be also. Our crosses are not our enemies; they are for our benefit and our glory.

The Cross Will Be the Judgment of the World: John 12:30-31

After the Father spoke from heaven with a voice of thunder (John 12:29), Jesus said, “Now is the judgment of this world (Greek: *kosmos* = *world order*); now the ruler of this world (*kosmos*) will be cast down” (John 12:30-31).

John Chrysostom commented¹⁵ that Satan was judged worthy of hell using his own standards as the accuser of the brethren. This is what Jesus meant when He said, “Now the ruler of this world will be cast out”.

But what is ‘the judgment of this world?’ It is as though He said, ‘there shall be a tribunal and retribution’. How, and in what way? ‘Satan slew the first man, having found him guilty of sin, for ‘by sin death entered’ (Romans 5:12); but in Me, he found no sin. Why then did he spring upon Me and give Me over to death? Why did he put into the mind of Judas to destroy Me? Don’t tell me that it was God’s dispensation, for this belongs not to the devil, but His wisdom. For the present let us inquire into the disposition of that evil one. ‘How then is the world judged in Me?’ It shall be said to Satan, as if a court of justice were sitting, ‘Well, you have slain all men, because you found them guilty of sin. But why did you slay Christ? Is it not clear that you did it wrongfully?’ Therefore in Him the whole world shall be avenged. But, that this may be still clearer, I will make it plain by an example. Suppose there is some cruel tyrant, bringing ten thousand evils on all those who fall into his hands. If such a one were to engage with another king’s son, and slay him unjustly, the death of the king’s son will have power to get revenge for the others also. Suppose there is one who demands payment of his debtors, and he beats them and casts them into prison. Then from the same recklessness, he leads to the same dungeon one who owes him nothing. Such a reckless man shall suffer punishment for what he has done to the others. For that innocent one shall destroy him.

So also it is in the case of the Son. Those things, which the devil has done against us, of these shall the penalty be required by means of what he has dared against Christ. To show that He implies this, hear what He said, ‘Now shall the prince of this world be cast down’, ‘by My Death’”.

Augustine of Hippo commented¹⁶ on this also, adding a logical sequence, and looking from the viewpoint of God’s justice.

“The method by which man was surrendered to the devil’s power ought not to be understood in the sense that it was the result of God’s command; rather

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVII, 2-3.

¹⁶ Augustine of Hippo, On the Trinity, XIII, xiv, 18.

He permitted it, but He did so with justice. When God deserted the sinner (without withholding His mercies), the instigator of the sin rushed in. Therefore God decided that to rescue man from the devil's power, He should overcome the devil by justice, not by power. And what is the justice by which the devil has been conquered? Surely it is the justice of Christ. And how has he been conquered? He was conquered because the devil put Christ to death, although he found in Him nothing that deserved death. 'The prince of this world is coming, and he finds nothing (that is, no sin) in Me' (John 14:30). From there He went to His passion. What could be more just than to go as far as the death of the cross for the sake of justice? First justice conquered the devil, because Christ had no sin and was most unjustly put to death by the devil. Then power conquered death by rising from the dead and ascending to heaven with the very flesh in which He was slain".

"The devil was conquered by his own trophy of victory, that is, death. By seducing the first man (Adam), the devil slew him; by slaying the last man (Christ), he lost the first from his snare".

Jesus Must Be Lifted Up: John 12:32-33

It was not just the Gentiles from Edessa that heard the Father speak to Jesus. The disciples and some of the Scribes and Pharisees along with many other people were there also. The text reads: "Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him'. Jesus answered and said, 'This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself'" (John 12:29-32).

Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus by night in late 27 AD, or about 2 1/2 years before the Crucifixion. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin (John 3:1, 10). Two years later in October, 29 AD, Nicodemus spoke in defense of Jesus, but was ridiculed and shouted down by the others (John 7:45-52). Finally, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, another member of the Sanhedrin, (Mark 15:43) performed the burial rite for Jesus (John 19:38-42) and were expelled from the council, imprisoned, and later exiled. Joseph ended up as Bishop of Britain and is the focal point of numerous Holy Grail legends. Nicodemus died while lamenting the death of the Deacon Stephen and was buried by Gamaliel¹⁷ in Gamaliel's own tomb. Nicodemus recognized that he was witnessing something utterly phenomenal in his midst: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2; compare also John 12:42-43).

Jesus proceeded to tell Nicodemus of baptism and being born again (John 3:3-6), which Nicodemus couldn't understand (John 3:9). Jesus continued to tell Nicodemus of heavenly things (John 3:12). Specifically, Jesus told him that He had come down from heaven and that His purpose was to be lifted up as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness (John 3:13-14). This involved not just earthly things but heavenly things (John 3:12). Later (late 29 AD), Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees again, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM" (John 8:28). I AM is the Name God gave Moses for Himself at the burning bush

¹⁷ Gamaliel was also a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34-40), and later became a Christian.

(Exodus 3:14). Finally during Holy Week, Jesus again mentioned the lifting up. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself” (John 12:32).

Thus, when Joseph and Nicodemus saw Jesus lifted up (i.e. crucified), they realized what He had been saying and they knew what they had to do, no matter what the personal consequences.

This “lifting up” goes back to Israel in the wilderness. The people rebelled against God and Moses; so the Lord sent “fiery snakes” among the people (Numbers 21:4-6). The term “fiery” refers to the burning and swelling that resulted from the snakes’ venom. In other places (Isaiah 30:6) the same snake is referred to as a “fiery hooded snake”. This narrows down the species of the snake to either an asp or a cobra.

When the people repented, the Lord told Moses to make a bronze replica of the snake and set it on a flagstaff (Numbers 21:7-9). Anyone who looked to the bronze snake lived. This bronze snake was very highly revered in later years, even to the point of cultic worship until reform-minded Hezekiah destroyed it 700 years later (2 Kings 18:1-4).

Bronze has generally been regarded to speak of judgment, since the Altar of Burnt Offering was also made of bronze (overlying wood). Paul spoke about how Christ, who knew no sin, was made to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:6). This is why Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Thus Jesus became the snake on the pole. And in doing so, the handwriting against us in ordinances, which was contrary to us, has been taken out of the way and nailed to the Cross (Colossians 2:13-14). The term “handwriting in ordinances” was a legal term referring to a debt that had to be paid because of money deposited with or lent to a person by another to be returned at an appointed time. Another example of this debt is found in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 18:23-35) where a slave owed his king 10,000 talents of silver (or almost 400 tons of silver).

John Chrysostom commented¹⁸ on the lifting up of the Son of Man thus: “But why did He not say plainly, I am about to be crucified, instead of referring His hearer to the ancient type?” Three reasons:

- “So that you may learn that the old things are akin to new, and that the one is not alien to the other.”
- “So that you may know that He came willingly to His passion”.
- “So you may learn that no harm arises to Him from the fact and that salvation springs from it for many”.

As a result of His being lifted up, Jesus said that He “will draw all *peoples* to Himself” (John 12:32). Paul spoke of this a number of times. “For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness (that is, of God) should dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, through Him whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His Cross” (Colossians 1:19-20).

Speaking about Jews (who had received the oracles of God) versus the Gentiles, Paul also said: “He created in Himself into one new man from the two, thus making peace, that He might

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXXVI,

reconcile both in one body to God through the Cross. For through Him, we both have access by One Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:15-18). John Chrysostom commented¹⁹ that this does not mean that the Gentiles were raised to the high heritage that belonged to the commonwealth of the Jews, but that He has raised both to one yet higher.

Not only were Jews and Gentiles reconciled, but both were given the deaconate of reconciliation themselves, since both are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. “Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the deaconate of reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning their trespasses to them and has committed to us the Word (Greek: *logos*) of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of Christ as God (the Father) beseeching through us: we beg on behalf of Christ, ‘Be reconciled to God’” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). John Chrysostom commented²⁰ on this: “We have succeeded to His functions. But if this appears to you a great thing, hear what follows also. He shows they do this not only on Christ’s behalf but also on behalf of the Father.

Thus the reconciliation of the world to Christ as He draws all peoples to Himself encompasses not only everything in heaven and earth but also uses those who are the fruit of the One grain of wheat (that fell in the ground and died) as the chief reconcilers.

The Pharisees Suppress the Faith: John 12:34-43

At this point, it is obvious that Jesus is no longer addressing the Gentile visitors from Mesopotamia. Now there are some of the religious leaders present, and they have been offended at hearing the Father speak to Jesus from heaven. They challenged Jesus’ statement that He must be lifted up, saying:

“We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how *can* You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up?’ Who is this Son of Man?” (John 12:34)

John Chrysostom had scathing comments²¹ regarding the boldface hypocrisy and deceit of the Jewish leaders. Jesus was trying to steer them away from hell, and they pretended they had never heard anything He ever said!

“Deceit is a thing easily detected, even though it is covered outside with ten thousand colors. Just as those who whitewash decayed walls cannot, by the plastering, make them sound, so too those who lie are easily found out, as in fact was the case here with the Jews. For when Christ (which means Messiah) said to them, ‘If I be lifted up I will draw all men to Me’; one of them said, ‘We have heard from the Law, that Messiah remains forever; and how do you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’”

“Even then they knew that Messiah was some Immortal One, and had life without end. And therefore they also knew what He meant; for often in Scripture the Passion and the Resurrection are mentioned in the same place. Thus Isaiah puts them together, saying, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7),

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, V.

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

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVIII, 1.

and all that follows (cf. Isaiah 53:12). David also in the second Psalm²², and in many other places, connects these two things. The Patriarch too after saying, ‘He lay down, He couched as a lion’, added, ‘And as a lion’s whelp, who shall raise Him up?’ (Genesis 49:9) He showed at once the Passion and the Resurrection.

But these men when they thought to silence Him, and to show that He was not the Messiah, confessed by this very circumstance that the Messiah remains forever. And observe their evil dealing; they did not say, ‘We have heard that Messiah neither suffers nor is crucified’, but that ‘He remains forever’. Yet even this would have been no real objection, for the Passion was no hindrance to His Immortality. Hence we may see that they understood many of the doubtful points, and deliberately went wrong. Since He had spoken before about death, when they now heard in this place the, ‘be lifted up’, they guessed that death was referred to. Then they said, ‘Who is this Son of Man?’ This too they did deceitfully, saying in effect: ‘We are not saying this concerning you through enmity’. They knew who He was speaking of, but pretended that they didn’t”.

What then does Jesus do? To silence them, and to show that the Passion is no impediment to His enduring forever, He said,

“A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:35-36).

In saying this, Jesus responded to their murderous intent with extreme gentleness and unspeakable loving-kindness.

After saying this, Jesus departed and “was hidden from them”. It was His custom to leave Jerusalem for the night to frustrate nighttime assassination attempts by the scribes and chief priests (Mark 11:18-19). He often spent the night in Bethany at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, who were quite wealthy and had a large house that could accommodate Jesus and His disciples (Luke 10:38-40). Other times He spent the night outdoors in the Garden of Gethsemane (a cemetery) with the Twelve, and Judas used this custom to arrange His arrest.

John Chrysostom stated²³ that there was a purpose for Jesus to hide Himself for a short time.

“Why then did He hide Himself? Walking in men’s hearts, He knew that their wrath was fierce, though they said nothing; He knew it boiling and murderous, and did not wait till it issued into action, but hid Himself, to avoid their hostility”.

²² Wherefore did the heathen rage, and the nations imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers gathered themselves together, against the Lord, and against his Christ; *saying*, ‘Let us break through their bonds, and cast away their yoke from us’. He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, and the Lord shall mock them. Then shall he speak to them in his anger, and trouble them in his fury. But I have been made king by him on Zion his holy mountain, declaring the ordinance of the Lord: the Lord said to me, You are my Son, to-day have I begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the heathen *for* your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* your possession. You shall rule them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces as a potter’s vessel (Psalm 2:1-9 LXX)

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVIII, 1.

Jesus was giving them every chance to turn their lives around. He had done so many signs before them, but still they did not believe in Him. It got so bad that they could not believe (John 12:39). Isaiah prophesied of this:

“You shall hear indeed, but you shall not understand; and you shall see indeed, but you shall not perceive. For the heart of this people has become glaringly bad, their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed. Lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (Isaiah 6:9-10, John 12:40).

Chrysostom addressed²⁴ the use of the term, “They could not believe”, instead of the term, “They would not believe”. These are related:

“He said in another place, ‘He that is able to receive it, let him receive it’ (Matthew 19:12). So in many places He uses the term ‘choice’, instead of power for action. Again, ‘The world cannot hate you, but Me it hates’ (John 7:7). This one may see observed in common conversation; as when a man says, ‘I cannot love this or that person’, calling the force of his will, power for action. Again, ‘this or that person cannot be a good man’. And what said the Prophet? ‘If the Ethiopian (i.e. black men) shall change his skin, or the leopard his spots, this people also shall be able to do good, having learned evil’ (Jeremiah 13:23 LXX). He said not that the doing of virtue is impossible to them, but that because they will not, therefore they cannot”.

All of the above refers to the general body of the Sanhedrin, including the Scribes, Pharisees and chief priests. There were exceptions, who kept their opinions quiet, “Lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42). Earlier John mentioned, “No one spoke openly of Jesus for fear of the Jews” (John 7:13). When the man-born-blind was healed, he did openly confess Jesus, to the great chagrin of the Pharisees (John 9:24-34). His parents cowered before the Pharisees, not wanting to be put out of the synagogue, and let their son do the talking (John 9:22-23). Within the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were secret disciples of Jesus for fear of the Jews (John 19:38-39). Later Gamaliel joined them.

This created a division among the Pharisees. One group said, “This man (Jesus) is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath”. The other group, which included Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel, were more perceptive and said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” (John 9:16) They had witnessed the Creator create a blind man’s eyes over again! Nicodemus had said the same thing during his secret meeting with Jesus two years earlier (John 3:2).

When the man-born-blind was “cast out of the synagogue” (John 9:34), he was “cut off from Israel.” The word used here, *kareth* (Hebrew to cut off, cut down, destroy) was used in a wide variety of contexts. There are times when *kareth* is clearly synonymous to death by stoning (Exodus 31:14-15, Leviticus 20:2-3). But there are many other times where an offender was cut off from Israel, but not specifically stoned. For example:

All of the above regulations have to do with maintaining the worship of God in an exact manner, which has its fulfillment in Christ. People who aren’t interested in doing this are not part of Israel in spirit. The seeming vagueness of the term “cut off” may have been intentional to

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVIII, 2.

Cut Off from Israel but Not Stoned	
Eating leavened bread during Passover	Exodus 12:15-20
Using Holy Oil improperly	Exodus 30:31-33
Eating offerings while unclean	Leviticus 7:15-21
Improper offerings	Leviticus 17:4-9
Drinking blood	Leviticus 17:10-14
Neglecting the Passover	Numbers 9:10-14
Neglecting purifications after defilement	Numbers 19:11-13

allow some discretion for judges to deal with individual cases where repentance may be forthcoming.

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

Chrysostom pointed out²⁵ that the Lord did not instruct the formerly blind man to believe, but asked him, “Do you believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35). The man had just been cut off from Israel for defending someone he didn’t even know. “Who is He that I may believe?” (John 9:36). “This expression is that of a longing and inquiring soul. He doesn’t know Him in whose defense he had spoken so much, that you may learn his love of truth”.

Chrysostom contrasted²⁶ this fear with the absence of fear in the Early Church, and he laid the cause of the problem on people who were overcome with the passions that corrupt the soul in slavery.

“It is necessary for us to avoid all the passions, which corrupt the soul, but most especially those, which from themselves generate numerous sins. I mean such as the love of money and vainglory. See, for instance, how the Pharisees were broken off from the faith through their love of honor. ‘Many’, it said, ‘of the chief rulers also believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 12:42). As He said also to them before, ‘How can you believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only?’ (John 5:44) So then they were not rulers, but slaves in the utmost slavery. However, this fear was afterwards done away, for nowhere during the time of the Apostles do we find them possessed by this feeling, since in their time both rulers and priests believed” (Acts 6:7).

Jesus Speaks the Words of the Father: John 12:44-50

“Then Jesus cried out and said, ‘He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. If anyone hears My words and

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

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIX, 1.

does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (John 12:44-50).

After retiring for the night out of harm’s way in Bethany, Jesus came back to Jerusalem for His last public appeal to the religious leaders before His Crucifixion. John Chrysostom stated²⁷ that this was a pattern that Jesus followed throughout His three years of public ministry.

“When He had retired, and had come to them again, He spoke with them in a lowly manner, saying, ‘He that believes on Me, believes not on Me, but on Him that sent Me’ (John 12:44). Observe what He does! He begins with humble and modest expressions, and speaks of the Father; then again He raises His language, and when He sees that they are exasperated, He retires; then He comes to them again, and again begins with words of humility. And where has He not done this?

See, for instance, what He said at the beginning, ‘As I hear, I judge’ (John 5:30). Then in a loftier tone, ‘As the Father raises up the dead, and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will’ (John 5:21). Again, ‘I judge you not, there is another that judges’ (John 8:15, 50). Then again He retires. Then coming to Galilee, ‘Labor not for the meat that perishes’ (John 6:27); and after having said great things of Himself, that He came down from Heaven, that He gives eternal life, He again withdraws Himself. And He comes in the Feast of Tabernacles also (John 7:37-39), and does the same. One may see Him continually thus varying His teaching, by His presence, by His absence, by lowly, by high discourses. Yet, ‘Though He had done so many miracles’, it said, ‘they didn’t believe on Him.’”

As Jesus spoke, He spoke of His relationship with the Father. Chrysostom stated²⁸ that He was speaking of His Essence:

“He that believes the Apostles, believes not them, but God. But that you might learn that He speaks here of the belief on His Essence, He didn’t say, ‘He that believes My words’, but, ‘He that believes on Me’. He has nowhere said conversely, ‘He that believes on the Father, believes not on the Father but on Me?’ Because they would have replied, ‘We believe on the Father, but we don’t believe on You’”.

“Because of their weakness, He led them in another way, showing that it is not possible to believe on the Father, without believing on Him. The words are not spoken as of man though, ‘He that sees Me, sees Him that sent Me’ (John 12:45). The ‘seeing’ of which He here speaks is that of the mind, thus showing the Consubstantiality. And the ‘believing on Me’ is as though one should say, ‘He that takes water from the river, takes it not from the river but from the fountain’. Or rather this image is too weak, when compared with the matter before us”.

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVIII, 2.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIX, 1.

“In saying, ‘I have come as a light into the world’ (John 12:46), Christ takes the Name that the Father is called by everywhere (i.e. Light) both in the Old Testament and in the New. Therefore Paul also calls Him, ‘Brightness’ (Hebrews 1:3), having learned to do so from this source. Jesus called Himself ‘light’, because He delivers from error, and dissolves mental darkness”.

Chrysostom continued²⁹ to point out that Jesus did not come to judge the world at His First Advent (John 12:48), but He chose His words such that no one will have any excuse for not believing when He comes at His Second Advent.

“Lest they should think, that for lack of power He passed by the despisers, therefore He spoke, ‘I came not to judge the world’ (John 12:47). Then, in order that they might not be made more negligent, when they had learned that ‘he that believes is saved, and he that disbelieves is punished’, He has also set before them a fearful court of judgment. ‘He that rejects Me, and receives not My words, has One to judge him’”.

“One might ask, ‘If the Father judges no man, and You have not come to judge the world, who judges him?’ ‘The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him’ (John 12:48). For since they said, ‘He is not from God’ (John 9:16), He said these things. Then ‘they shall not be able to say these things, but the words which He spoke, shall be in place of an accuser, convicting them, and cutting off all excuse’. And ‘the word which I have spoken’ refers to the words that the Father gave Him to speak”.

Some had argued that if Christ was sent by the Father, and then received commandment as to what He should say, then He didn’t know what to say before He was sent, thus making Him at best, a lesser God. Chrysostom said³⁰,

“If one takes the words of Christ in this sense, then one does not understand the cause of His lowliness? Yet Paul said, that both he and those who were made disciples knew ‘what was that good and acceptable and perfect will of God’ (Romans 12:2). Was it only the Son that did not know until He had received commandment? How can this be reasonable? Don’t you see that He brings His expressions to an excess of humility that He may both draw those men over, and silence those who should come after. This is why He utters words befitting a mere man, so He may force us to pass over the lowliness of the sayings, as being conscious that the words belong not to His Nature, but are suited to the infirmity of the hearers”.

“Vainglory is a terrible thing, really terrible (Ephesians 4:17-19); this causes men to disbelieve, and others to believe wrongly, so that the things which were said for the sake of those men, through loving-kindness, they turned to sacrilege”.

Parable from the Old Testament: Ezekiel 2:3-3:3 “Ezekiel Sent to Rebellious Israel”

The experience of Ezekiel in the 6th Century BC in dealing with the leaders of Israel closely parallels that of Christ in the 1st Century AD. John Chrysostom stated³¹ that when

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIX, 2.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXIX, 2.

³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, IV.

Ezekiel was given the book to eat (Ezekiel 3:1-3), he ate what he was about to utter. The text of the Parable is:

And he said to me, “Son of Man, I send you forth to the house of Israel, them that provoke me; who have provoked me, they and their fathers to this day. And you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord’. Whether then indeed they shall hear or fear (for it is a provoking house,) yet they shall know that you are a prophet in their midst. Don’t fear them, son of man, or be dismayed at their face. They will madden and will rise up against you round about, and you will dwell in the midst of scorpions. Be not afraid of their words, or be dismayed at their countenance, for it is a provoking house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they will hear or fear; for it is a provoking house”.

“Son of man, hear him that speaks to you; do not be provoking, as the provoking house; open your mouth, and eat what I give you”. I looked, and behold, a hand stretched out to me, and in it a volume of a book. He unrolled it before me; in it the front and the back were written on; and there was written in it lamentation, and mournful song, and woe.

He said to me, “Son of Man, eat this volume, and go and speak to the children of Israel”. So he opened my mouth, and caused me to eat the volume. And he said to me, “Son of man, your mouth shall eat, and your belly shall be filled with this volume that is given to you”. So I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey” (Ezekiel 2:3-3:3).

Clement of Alexandria stated³² that it is a sign of great love for the Lord to try to admonish His people.

“Admonition, then, is the censure of loving care, and produces understanding. Such is the Instructor in His admonitions, as when He says in the Gospel, ‘How often would I have gathered your children, as a bird gathers her young ones under her wings, and you would not!’ (Matthew 23:37) And again, the Scripture admonishes, saying, ‘And they committed adultery with stock and stone, and burnt incense to Baal’ (Jeremiah 3:9, 7:9, 11:13, 32:29). For it is a very great proof of His love, that, though knowing well the shamelessness of the people that had kicked and bounded away, He notwithstanding exhorts them to repentance. He says by Ezekiel, ‘Son of man, you dwell in the midst of scorpions; nevertheless, speak to them, if perhaps they will hear’” (Ezekiel 2:6-7).

Ambrose stated³³ that the people of God have always shed tears over the unrepentant in hope that they might come around.

“The people of Nineveh mourned, and escaped the destruction of their city. Such is the remedial power of repentance, that God seems because of it to change His intention. To escape is, then, in your own power; the Lord wills to be entreated, He wills that men should hope in Him, He wills that supplication should be made to Him. You are a man, and want to be asked to forgive, and do you think that God will pardon you without asking Him?”

“The Lord Himself wept over Jerusalem, that, inasmuch as it would not weep itself, it might obtain forgiveness through the tears of the Lord. He wills that we should weep in order that we may escape, as you find it in the Gospel,

³² Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, I, 9.

³³ Ambrose, *Two Books Concerning Repentance*, II, 48-51.

‘Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves’” (Luke 23:28).

“David wept, and obtained of the divine mercy the removal of the death of the people who were perishing, when of the three things proposed for his choice he selected that in which he might have the most experience of the divine mercy (1 Chronicles 21:8-14). Why do you blush to weep for your sins, when God commanded even the prophets to weep for the people?”

“And, lastly, Ezekiel was bidden to weep for Jerusalem, and he took the book, at the beginning of which was written, ‘Lamentation, and melody, and woe’ (Ezekiel 2:9 LXX),” two things sad and one pleasant, for he shall be saved in the future who has wept most in this age. ‘For the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning and the heart of fools in the house of feasting’ (Ecclesiastes 7:4). And the Lord Himself said, ‘Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh’” (Luke 6:21).

One might wonder why Jesus kept trying to soften and convert the Jewish leaders, when He knew they would not turn. Ezekiel faced the same problem. John Chrysostom stated³⁴ that we will receive a reward for our faithfulness, even if the people we are working with are ungrateful and unrepentant. After all, if we have done our part, the rest is up to the person of the Holy Spirit, Who will not violate the choice of the person involved.

“For even though the soil which we cultivate brings forth no fruit, if we have shown all industry, our Lord will not allow us to depart with disappointed hopes, but will give us a recompense. Paul says, ‘Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor’ (1 Corinthians 3:8), not according to the event of things. And that it is so, listen, ‘Son of man, testify to this people, if they will hear, and if they will understand’ (Ezekiel 2:5). Ezekiel says, ‘If the watchman gives warning regarding what to flee from and what to choose, he has delivered his own soul, although there be none that will listen’ (Ezekiel 3:18, 33:9). We have this strong consolation, and are confident of the recompense that shall be made to us.”

“Still when we see that the work in you does not go forward, our state is not better than the state of those husbandmen who lament and mourn, who hide their faces and are ashamed. This is the sympathy of a teacher; this is the natural care of a father. It was in Moses’ power to have been delivered from the ingratitude of the Jews, and to have laid the more glorious foundation of another and far greater people. ‘Let Me alone’, said God, ‘that I may consume them, and make of you a nation mightier than this’ (Exodus 32:10). Because he was a holy man, the servant of God, and a friend very true and generous, he did not heed this word. Rather he chose to perish with those who had been once allotted to him, than without them to be saved and be in greater honor. Such ought he to be who has the charge of souls”.

Gregory the Great wrote³⁵ to Maximus, his fellow Bishop, to continue doing good and standing on behalf of the poor and oppressed, even though he dwells among scorpions. Consider the luminaries of the past and how they lived their lives among the enemies of God, as Jesus and Ezekiel also did.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIII, 1.

³⁵ Gregory the Great, Epistle 36, Book 10.

“It is written, ‘Rescue them that are drawn unto death, and don’t forbid to deliver them that are ready to be slain’ (Proverbs 24:11). But if you should say, ‘My powers are insufficient, He who sees into the heart understands’. In all that you do, then, desire to have Him, Who sees into the heart well pleased with you. But whatever there is whereby He may be pleased don’t omit doing. Human terrors and favors are like smoke, which is snatched by a light breeze and vanishes away. Know this most assuredly, that no one can please God and bad men at the same time. Esteem yourself to have pleased Almighty God in such degree, as you know yourself to have displeased disobedient men. But our defense of the poor must be found of such sort that both the humble may feel protection and oppressors may not easily find things that they may blame out of a malevolent disposition. Listen, then, to what is said to Ezekiel, ‘Son of man, unbelievers and destroyers are with you, and you dwell among scorpions’ (Ezekiel 2:6). The blessed Job says, ‘I have been a brother of dragons, and a companion of owls’ (Job 30:29). Paul says to his disciples, ‘In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world’ (Philippians 2:15). We ought, then, to walk all the more cautiously as we know that we are living among the enemies of God”.

Ambrose, in addressing Peter’s words to Simon Magus³⁶ (Acts 8:9-24), spoke³⁷ in such a way as to leave the door open for repentance, even though such was highly unlikely. This may seem like ignorance or doubt about what will happen, but he compared this to the words of the prophets and the Lord Himself, who also addressed people who were very unlikely to repent. Similarly, when the Lord spoke to the Jewish leaders in His last public appeal, He knew that they would reject His words and crucify Him, but He gave them one last chance anyway.

“Let this be my answer to them. I say that Peter did not doubt regarding Simon Magus. If they think that Peter doubted, did God doubt? He said to the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and you shall give an answer to all Judah, to those who come to worship in the Lord’s house, even all the words which I have appointed for you to answer them. Don’t keep back a word! Perhaps they will listen and perhaps they will be converted’ (Jeremiah 26:2-3). Let them say, then, that God also didn’t know what would happen”.

“Ignorance is not implied in that word. The Lord also said to Ezekiel, ‘Son of man, I will send you to the house of Israel, to those who have angered Me, both themselves and their fathers, up to this day, and you shall say unto them. Thus said the Lord, if perhaps they will hear and be afraid’ (Ezekiel 2:5). Did He not know that they could or could not be converted? So, then, that expression is not always a proof of doubt”.

Jerome, writing³⁸ to a deacon, calling him to repentance, mentioned the three things that were written in the book that Ezekiel was given to eat; that is, lamentation, and melody, and woe:

“The first of these three belongs to you if you prove willing, as a sinner, to repent of your sins. The second belongs to those who are holy, who are called on to sing praises to God; for praise does not become a sinner’s mouth. And the

³⁶ Simon Magus was referred to as the “Heresiarch”, and the source of all 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century heresies. For details, see Mark Kern, “Simon Magus the Heresiarch”, St. Athanasius Press, 2002.

³⁷ Ambrose, Two Books Concerning Repentance, II, v, 30-31.

³⁸ Jerome, Letters, CXLVII, 3.

third belongs to persons like you, who in despair have given themselves over to uncleanness, to fornication, to the belly, and to the lowest lusts; men who suppose that death ends all and that there is nothing beyond it. Who say, ‘When the overflowing scourge shall pass through it shall not come to us’” (Isaiah 28:15 LXX).

“The book, which the prophet eats, is the whole series of the Scriptures, which in turn bewail the penitent, celebrate the righteous, and curse the desperate. Nothing is so displeasing to God as an impenitent heart. Impenitence is the one sin for which there is no forgiveness. If one who ceases to sin is pardoned even after he has sinned, and if prayer has power to bend the judge; it follows that every impenitent sinner must provoke his judge to wrath. Thus despair is the one sin for which there is no remedy. By obstinate rejection of God’s grace men turn His mercy into sternness and severity”.

Jerome, writing³⁹ again to a man, who broke a vow, stated that good men have always sorrowed for the sins of others, and the prophets and Apostles did this a lot.

“Good men have always sorrowed for the sins of others. Samuel of old lamented for Saul because he neglected to treat the ulcers of pride with the balm of penitence (1 Samuel 15:35). Paul wept for the Corinthians who refused to wash out with their tears the stains of fornication (2 Corinthians 2:4). For the same reason Ezekiel swallowed the book, which was written inside and out with song, lamentation and woe (Ezekiel 2:10 LXX). The song is the praise of the righteous, the lamentation is over the penitent, and the woe is for those of whom it is written, ‘When the wicked man falls into the depths of evil, then is he filled with scorn’ (Proverbs 18:3). It is to these that Isaiah refers when he says, ‘In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping and to mourning. And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen; and killing sheep, eating meat and saying, ‘let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (Isaiah 22:13). Yet of such persons Ezekiel is bidden to speak thus, ‘O you son of man, speak to the house of Israel; Thus you speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins are on us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live’. Again, ‘Turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?’ (Ezekiel 33:10-11) Nothing makes God so angry as when men from despair of better things cling to those which are worse; this despair in itself is a sign of unbelief. One who despairs of salvation can have no expectation of a judgment to come. If he dreaded such, he would, by doing good works, prepare to meet his Judge.

³⁹ Jerome, Letters, CXXII, 1.

Holy Wednesday Anointing Unction Service ***The Anointing and Betrayal of Jesus***

March 31, 2010
Revision A

Gospel: Matthew 26:6-16

As shown in Table 1, there are three events describing a woman anointing Jesus, where two of them occurred immediately before His Crucifixion. John records one of the events just before the Crucifixion and Matthew and Mark record the other one. The first was at Mary and Martha's house, and the second was at the home of Simon the Leper. At the first, Judas was indignant; at the second, some of the others were indignant also.

The first of these two events occurred six days before Passover; the other occurred two days before Passover. Since the oil of spikenard was so expensive, it is extremely unlikely that two individuals were involved. Mary started with a pound⁴⁰ of oil of spikenard⁴¹, which was imported from East India. She anointed Jesus' feet the evening prior to Palm Sabbath, which was a Saturday. Then on Wednesday evening she did it again, this time breaking the alabaster flask and pouring the rest of the oil of nard on Jesus' head such that it ran down his beard, shoulders, etc. Because of the first anointing, Jesus smelled like a King as He rode into Jerusalem on the colt. Because of the second, He smelled like a King at His burial.

The second anointing took place at the home of Simon the leper (Matthew 26:6, Mark 14:3), who is also called Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) and who may have been the one who was healed of his leprosy by Jesus (Luke 5:12-16). Simon later was ordained as an apostle and evangelized the area around Gaul (modern France). There is strong tradition that Mary and Martha helping to evangelize Gaul also and they may have worked with Simon (who later took the name Julian) in this area. From the Gospel account and the parallel accounts, Simon, Mary and Martha all lived in Bethany and were probably close friends and may have been relatives.

To understand the last of the three anointings, which is the Gospel under consideration, it is instructive to examine the previous two first.

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⁴⁰ Greek: *litra* meaning the Roman pound consisting of 12 Troy ounces

⁴¹ An unrelated plant with an aromatic root and the same name is grown in the US.

Table 1
The Anointing of Jesus

	LUKE	JOHN	MATTHEW	MARK
When?	Two years before Passover	Six days before Passover	Two days before Passover	Two days before Passover
Where?	At home of Simon the Pharisee	At house of Mary & Martha	At home of Simon the Leper	At home of Simon the Leper
Who?	A woman who was a "sinner"	Mary of Bethany	A woman	A woman
What material?	A fragrant oil	A litra of very costly oil of pure nard	Very costly fragrant oil	Very costly oil of pure nard
How applied?	Washed feet with tears, wiped with hair, kissed and anointed feet	Anointed Jesus feet, wiped with her hair	Poured on Jesus' head	Broke flask and poured on Jesus' head
What container?	An alabaster flask	-----	An alabaster flask	An alabaster flask
Reaction of 12	Simon the Pharisee wondered why Jesus let her touch Him	Judas Iscariot questioned why this was done	His disciples were angry	Some were angry with themselves

Jesus Anointed by a Former Harlot at Simon's House

In the year 28 AD, after the Twelve Apostles were selected (Luke 6:12-16), but before they were sent out two-by-two (Luke 9:1-6), Jesus was invited to the home of Simon the Pharisee. This event probably took place in or near Capernaum. Luke records this as follows:

“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind *Him* weeping. And she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw *this*, he spoke to himself, saying, ‘This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman *this is* who is touching Him, for she is a sinner’”.

“And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you’. So he said, ‘Teacher, say it’. ‘There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more’. And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged’. Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, *which are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little’. Then He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven’. And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to

themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace’” (Luke 7:36-50).

Jerome⁴² speculated that the prostitute was Mary Magdalene. This is not the case, since Mary Magdalene was not a former prostitute. Jesus had expelled seven demons from her (Luke 8:2), but she was a wealthy woman, and a virgin, and she spent her time visiting and ministering to the sick and the infirm⁴³. The seven demons had been trying to torment her and distract her from what she was doing.

The Apostle John refers to Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, as the woman who had anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair (John 11:2). However John Chrysostom stated⁴⁴ that the Apostle John was looking forward to Mary’s anointing just before Passover when she did that (John 12:1-8), and not back to what happened two years earlier.

“John informs us who were Lazarus’ sisters; and, moreover, what Mary had more than the others. Here some doubting say, ‘How did the Lord endure that a woman should do this?’ In the first place then it is necessary to understand, that this is not the harlot mentioned earlier (Luke 7:37), but a different person. She was a harlot full of many vices, but Mary was both serious and earnest; for she showed her earnestness about the entertainment of Christ” (Luke 10:38-39).

Simon the Pharisee, who invited Jesus to dinner, was probably the same person that Jesus had healed of leprosy about six months earlier in late 27 AD. Shortly after Jesus called four of His disciples, He met a man in a certain city who was full of leprosy, and He healed him (Luke 5:12-14). Since lepers were outcasts, finding a leper in a city is unusual, unless he were someone important. Later, just before Passover in 30 AD, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus at the home of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3); this Simon was probably the same person Jesus healed almost three years earlier. Simon the Pharisee is probably the same person as Simon the leper, since his social position as a Pharisee would give him special privileges so as to avoid exclusion and isolation as a leper.

When Simon the Pharisee, the healed leper, saw the woman who was a known prostitute touching Jesus, he was aghast. From the Mosaic Law, anyone that the prostitute touched became unclean (Leviticus 15:1-12). Simon could not see how Jesus, if He were a prophet, would allow this. Prophets who became unclean ceased hearing from God as prophets. But Simon did not say this aloud, but only spoke to himself. Jesus answered his thoughts by posing the question regarding who loved more, one who was forgiven fifty denarii or one who was forgiven five hundred denarii. Simon, who was a scholar in the Mosaic Law, had been forgiven the fifty; the woman, who had come to a profoundly deep repentance in her weeping, had been forgiven the five hundred.

One can see a major difference in the tone of Jesus’ conversation to Simon the Pharisee in 28 AD as compared to His conversation with another Pharisee who invited Him to dinner about a year later (Luke 14:1-7). Jesus was very gentle with Simon, and those present with him marveled at Jesus, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49) The Twelve Apostles had

⁴² Jerome, Letters, XII.

⁴³ Holy Apostles Convent, The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Buena Vista, CO, 2008, pp. 907-910.

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXII, 1. See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXX, 2, where Chrysostom identifies Mary of Bethany as a former harlot.

similar reactions to Jesus' works at about this time, such as at the calming of a storm, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and the waters, and they obey Him!" (Luke 8:25) In contrast, at the dinner in 29 AD, "They watched Jesus closely" (Luke 14:1) because they were looking for some way to trap Him.

The difference in Jesus' tone is because Simon had become His follower, and after Pentecost, he was ordained Bishop of Gaul at Le Mans⁴⁵, taking the name, Julian. After a while, Mary and Martha of Bethany joined him there after their ordeal with the Jewish leaders. After Pentecost, the Jewish leaders followed through on their threat to kill Lazarus (John 12:10). Putting Mary, Martha and Lazarus in a leaking boat, they set them adrift at sea with no oars, rudder, food or water. Miraculously, they landed on Cyprus where Lazarus was later ordained bishop. Mary and Martha later went to Gaul⁴⁶ to join their friend, Simon. Together they founded a number of Churches⁴⁷ in what is now Southern France. Mary of Bethany spent the last 30 years of her life⁴⁸ in fasting and prayer in the cavern "Le Saints Baume" high in the Maritime Alps. A sometimes confusing aspect is that Western tradition links Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene and the prostitute who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:37) as the same person. Eastern tradition states that they were three different people.

The Baptism of Tears

Some of the Church Fathers also speak of something called a baptism of tears. This term is not found in the Scriptures but there are examples of people who experienced this in the Scriptures. Perhaps the best known example is the story at the dinner at Simon the Pharisee's house of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and with fragrant oil and who wiped His feet with her hair (Luke 7:36-40).

One striking characteristic about the events is that the woman loved much because she was forgiven much (Luke 7:41-47). Jesus made a big deal about this to the Pharisees who invited Him to dinner -- she loved more than they did because she was forgiven more than they were (Luke 7:41, 42, 47). The text is used as the Gospel lesson on days commemorating Holy Nuns from the idea that they, like the woman in Luke 7, loved much, but not because they were former prostitutes.

David wept over his condition a great deal. He described his bed as being drenched in his tears (Psalm 6:6) and how tears had been his food day and night (Psalm 42:3), while King Saul was hunting him down like an animal. King Hezekiah also shed tears of repentance and petition on his death bed -- which the Lord answered immediately (2 Kings 20:1-6). Paul (Acts 20:31) and Timothy (2 Timothy 1:4) are described as expending a lot of tears also.

Tears in our culture are considered unmanly in men and a weakness in women. In the ancient Near East, however, many people kept tear bottles⁴⁹ in which they stored all the tears they shed their whole lives (Psalm 56:8).

⁴⁵ Thurston and Attwater, Butler's Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, January 27.

⁴⁶ Thurston and Attwater, Butler's Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, July 29.

⁴⁷ F. L. Cross, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 879.

⁴⁸ Thurston and Attwater, Butler's Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, July 22.

⁴⁹ G. Christian Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, Good News Broadcasting Association, Lincoln NE, 1972, p. 90.

Ambrose stated⁵⁰ that there is great depth in the counsel of the Lord's words, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:50). Some of this he describes as follows:

"Men are more readily led on to do the things that are right by kindness than by fear; love is more advantageous than dread for correction. By His grace, sin is forgiven in baptism in order to make us more grateful to Him. It is fitting for God that those whom He has invited by grace He should lead on by increase of that grace. And so He first bestows on us a gift by baptism, and afterwards gives more abundantly to those who serve Him faithfully. So, then, the benefits of Christ are both incentives and rewards of virtue".

"We were before under a hard creditor, who was only satisfied and paid to the full by the death of the debtor".

"But we have changed our creditor, or rather we have escaped, for the debt remains but the interest is canceled. All are forgiven; there is no one whom He has not loosed. Thus it is written, that He has forgiven 'all transgressions, doing away the handwriting of the ordinance that was against us'" (Colossians 2:14).

"Take care that you do not begin to be in a worse case as creditor than as debtor, like the man in the Gospel, to whom his Lord forgave all his debt, and who afterwards began to exact from his fellow-servant that which he himself had not paid. For this reason his master exacted from him, with the bitterest reproaches, that which he had forgiven him. Let us, then, forgive few things to whom many have been forgiven, for we are the more well pleasing to God, the more we have been forgiven".

"The Pharisee judges well concerning others, but does not believe that which he thinks well of in others. Christ said to him: 'You have rightly judged'. God had said to Cain, 'If you offer rightly, but do not divide rightly, you have sinned, be still' (Genesis 4:7 LXX). So, then, this man offered rightly, for he judges that Christ ought to be more loved by Christians, because He has forgiven us many sins; but he did not divide rightly, because he thought that He could be ignorant of Him Who forgave the sins of men".

Clement of Alexandria spoke⁵¹ of a symbolic meaning of Luke's account of the woman anointing Jesus. His anointed feet are the Apostles traveling around the world with the Gospel.

"The woman, before she received the Word, while she was still a sinner, honored the Lord with what she thought the most precious thing in her possession — the ointment. With the ornament of her person, with her hair, she wiped off the superfluous physical ointment, while she expended on the Lord tears of repentance; 'wherefore her sins are forgiven' (Luke 7:48). This may be a symbol of the Lord's teaching, and of His suffering. For the feet anointed with fragrant ointment means divine instruction traveling with renown to the ends of the earth. 'Their sound has gone forth to the ends of the earth' (Psalm 19:4, Romans 10:18). The feet of the Lord, which were anointed, are the Apostles, who according to prophecy received the fragrant unction of the Holy Spirit. Those who traveled over the world and preached the Gospel are figuratively called the feet of the Lord. Of whom also the Holy Spirit foretells in the Psalm, 'Let us adore at the place where His feet stood' (Psalm 122:2 LXX), that is, where the Apostles, His feet, arrived. Preached by them, He came to the ends of the earth. Tears are

⁵⁰ Ambrose, *Letters*, XLI, 6-10.

⁵¹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, II, 8.

repentance; and the loosened hair proclaimed deliverance from the love of finery and vainglory”.

Jesus Anointed by Mary of Bethany Six Days before Passover

In 30 AD, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with a very costly oil of spikenard just prior to His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sabbath. The account reads as follows:

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’ This he said not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always’” (John 12:1-8).”

Mary had some spiritual insight in doing this that can easily go unnoticed. Jesus had been saying that He would be killed by the Scribes, Chief Priests and Pharisees, and that He would rise on the third day (Matthew 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, 27:64). The Twelve either did not understand what He said, or thought that He wouldn’t allow this to happen to Him if He could prevent it. Jesus, however, recognized Mary’s intent as a preparation for His burial.

Mary was one of the small group of women known as “The Myrrh-Bearing Women”. Others among that group were Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, Martha, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Joanna, Suzanna, and Salome. These women traveled with Jesus and His disciples from Galilee (Luke 23:55), and they funded Jesus 3-year public ministry out of their possessions (Luke 8:3). Mary Magdalene was probably the wealthiest, but Mary and Martha were women of means also.

We can recognize Mary’s wealth by noticing several things. First, they had a very large house. It was large enough to accommodate Jesus, the Twelve and a number of the Seventy when they came to Jerusalem and were reluctant to stay overnight too close to the plotting of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 21:17, Luke 10:38-42). The house was also large enough to hold a reception attended by many of the Jewish leaders at Lazarus’ funeral (John 11:19, 31). Second, she could afford a pound of pure oil of spikenard worth over 300 denarii (John 12:3-5) to anoint Jesus with. Third, her brother Lazarus was given a rich man’s funeral, with embalming and wrapping in strips of linen (John 11:44), as opposed to the poor man’s funeral for the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:14-15), who was simply covered with a sheet in an open coffin. Jesus Himself was given a rich man’s funeral by two rich men, and laid in the tomb of a rich man (John 19:38-42).

Judas Objects to Mary's "Waste" of the Costly Oil

There are several aspects to Judas' objection that John mentions. The obvious part is that he just wanted to line his own pockets with the money collected for the poor. The sale of this costly oil for 300 denarii⁵² would have lined Judas' pocket quite well.

A disturbing question that we might have is why Jesus allowed Judas to have charge of the moneybox when He knew he was a thief. This is equivalent to the Pastor and the Finance Committee of a Church giving sole responsibility of the Church budget to a known thief. Most people just don't do that! Why would the Lord put the bag for the poor in the hands of a thief; why would he make him steward who was a lover of money? John Chrysostom suggested⁵³ that the Lord was very concerned for Judas' salvation.

"This cut him off from all excuse. Judas could not say that he betrayed the Lord from love of money for he had in the bag sufficient to satisfy his desire; he betrayed the Lord from excessive wickedness which Christ wished to restrain. Therefore He did not even rebuke Judas as stealing, although aware of it. 'Let her alone', He said, 'for she has kept this for the day of My burial' (John 12:7). But the Lord's words did not reach or soften Judas at all. Even at the Lord's Supper in the upper room, when Satan entered Judas (John 13:27), the Lord told him 'what you do, do quickly'".

This presents quite a contrast between Mary and Judas. Both had followed Jesus for three years, and Judas had even been given the authority to heal the sick and raise the dead. Both had watched the Master do the same. But the realization of just Who Jesus was had penetrated Mary's heart, but had not affected Judas. Mary so appreciated the Master's forgiveness that she spent a great deal of money on ointment to prepare for His burial (John 12:7). Judas couldn't care less, and sold the Master for a few coins (Matthew 26:15).

One of the hymns for Holy Tuesday⁵⁴ states, "The adulterous woman⁵⁵, O Christ, approaching You and pouring on Your feet ointment with tears, was delivered by Your command from the rottenness of iniquity. But the ingrate Disciple, who was fully possessed of Your grace, and wallowed in the mire, selling You with the love of silver. Glory be to Your compassion, O Lover of mankind".

Commenting on Judas' love of money, Chrysostom pointed out⁵⁶ that Paul referred to covetousness as idolatry (Colossians 3:5) and a very intense slavery that is difficult to escape from. It can warp one's life and cause the forfeit of one's salvation.

"A dreadful thing is the love of money; it disables both eyes and ears, and makes men worse to deal with than a wild beast. It allows a man to consider neither conscience, nor friendship, nor fellowship, nor the salvation of his own soul. But having withdrawn them at once from all these things, like some harsh mistress, it makes those captured by it its slaves. The dreadful part of so bitter a

⁵² One denarius was a day's wage for a laborer (Matthew 20:1-2).

⁵³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXV, 2.

⁵⁴ Seraphim Nassar, Divine Prayers and Services, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, Englewood, NJ, 1993, p. 773-774.

⁵⁵ This is the adulterous woman from Luke 7:36-50. Church tradition holds that the woman who anointed Jesus just before Passover was a chaste, virtuous woman. See Seraphim Nassar, Divine Prayers and Services, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, Englewood, NJ, 1993, p. 778.

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXV, 3.

slavery is that it persuades them even to be grateful for it. The more they become enslaved, the more does their pleasure increase; in this way especially the malady becomes incurable, in this way the monster becomes hard to conquer. This made Gehazi a leper instead of a disciple and a prophet (2 Kings 5:15-27); this destroyed Ananias and her with him (Acts 5:1-11); this made Judas a traitor (John 12:6); this corrupted the rulers of the Jews, who received gifts, and became the partners of thieves (Matthew 23:14-21). Paul called it 'idolatry' (Colossians 3:5), and not even so has he deterred men from it. Why did he call it 'idolatry?' Many possess wealth, and dare not use it, but consecrate it, handing it down untouched, not daring to touch it, as though it were some devoted thing⁵⁷. If at any time they are forced to do so, they feel as though they had done something unlawful. As the Greek carefully tends his graven image, so you entrust your gold to doors and bars; you provide a chest instead of a shrine, and lay it up in silver vessels. You may not bow down to it as he does to the image; yet you show all kind of attention to it.

Again, the Greek would rather give up his eyes or his life than his graven image. So also would those who love gold. 'But', said one, 'I don't worship the gold'. Neither does he worship the image, but the devil that dwells in it (Deuteronomy 32:17); and in like manner you, though you don't worship the gold, yet you worship that devil who springs on your soul, from the sight of the gold and your lust for it. Far more grievous than an evil spirit is the lust of money-loving and many obey it more than others do idols. For these in many things disobey; but in this case they yield everything, and whatever it tells them to do, they obey. 'Be at war with all', it says, 'at enmity with all, know not nature, despise God, sacrifice to me yourself', and in all they obey. To the graven images they sacrifice oxen and sheep; but avarice says, 'sacrifice to me your own soul', and the man obeys".

While the covetous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God, not even so do they fear. (1 Corinthians 6:10). This covetousness is weaker than all the others; it is not inborn, nor natural. If it were, it would have been placed in us at the beginning; but there was no gold at the beginning, and no man desired gold. By each man's envying the one before him, men have increased the disease, and he who has gotten it in advance provokes him who had no desire. When men see splendid houses, extensive lands, troops of slaves, silver vessels, and great heaps of apparel, they use every means to outdo them; so that the first set of men are causes of the second, and these of those who come after.

Theophylact compared⁵⁸ the service offered by Mary with the criticism offered by Judas regarding serving the poor:

⁵⁷ "The devoted thing" is a technical term that is rendered in the LXX as the "Anathema", and there are several aspects to this. The anathema was a kind of a vow, either initiated by an individual regarding some of his possessions or as a command by the Lord out of righteous judgment. For example, anything a man devotes to the Lord is holy, is not redeemable and is called anathema (Leviticus 27:28). On the other hand, the Canaanite king of Arad and his destroyed cities were named "Anathema" (Numbers 21:2-3). Because Achan took some of the anathema to his home he became anathema also (Joshua 7, 22:20). Chrysostom is saying that wealth can become very much like the things Achan took from the ruins of Jericho.

⁵⁸ Theophylact, The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Mark, Ch. 14, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 118-119.

“‘Why do you trouble her?’, He asks. She has offered a gift; why do you turn her away with a rebuke? At the same time He chastises the betrayer, saying to him, ‘She has done this for My burial’, reproving him for his lack of conscience. It is as if the Lord were saying to him, ‘You will hand Me over to death, and you do not reproach yourself. But she, inspired by God, has brought myrrh for My burial. Does she deserve your reproach?’ Here the Lord makes two prophecies. First, the Gospel will be preached throughout the whole world. Second, the deed of this woman will be preached together with the Gospel. From this text, let those be confounded who put the poor above Christ. For I have heard goldsmiths say, ‘If I make a living melting down a holy vessel in order to give to the poor, it is no crime’. Let them hear that Christ prefers service to Himself above service to the poor. The Body of Christ is, literally, that which is on the golden paten, and His Blood is that which is in the chalice. Therefore that man, who takes away the costly paten, and compels the Body of Christ to be placed upon a cheaper one, using the pretext of serving the poor; let it be known that he will share the fate of Judas”.

Jesus Anointed by Mary of Bethany Again Two Days before Passover

On Wednesday of Holy Week, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus again. The location is now the house of Simon the leper, not the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Whereas six days before Passover (John 12:1) she anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair, now it is two days before Passover (Matthew 26:2, Mark 14:1) and she poured the oil on His head. According to Mark’s account, she broke the alabaster flask as she did this (Mark 14:3). Matthew’s account reads:

“And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, ‘Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor’. But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, ‘Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Matthew 26:6-13).

This time it is not Judas who criticizes Mary for “this waste”, but the other disciples. Again, they valued it at 300 danarii, just as Judas had four days ago. Again Jesus commends Mary for doing this for His burial, and that she will be remembered for this everywhere that the Gospel is preached. Four days ago Mary had used part of the “Oil of Spikenard” on Jesus’ feet; this time she emptied the flask and broke it open to get it all out for anointing His head. In doing so, the oil ran down His neck and beard and covered His body.

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁹ some things about Mary; especially that she recognized Him as God:

“After many other women, the Samaritan (John 4:7-39), the Canaanite (Matthew 15:22-28), her that had the issue⁶⁰ of blood (Mark 5:25-34), and other

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXX, 1.

besides, that she came to Him, conscious to herself of much impurity; and then not publicly but in a house. Whereas all the others came to Him for the healing of the body alone, she came to Him by way of honor only, and for the amendment of the soul. She was not at all afflicted in body, so that for this most especially one might marvel at her. And not as to a mere man did she come to Him; for then she would not have wiped His feet with her hair, but as to one greater than man can be”.

In contrast to Mary, the Twelve and the other disciples were not as aware of what was happening. Later they would understand; Chrysostom describes⁶¹ their state-of-affairs:

“Why were the disciples indignant at this? They heard the Master saying, ‘I will have mercy, and not sacrifice’ (Matthew 9:13, 12:7). He blamed the Jews, because they omitted the weightier matters, justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23), and He spoke at length on the mount concerning almsgiving (Matthew 6:1-4). From these things they inferred and reasoned that if He does not accept whole burnt offerings, or the ancient worship, much more will He not accept the anointing of oil”.

“Knowing her intention, however, He allows her. Great was her reverence, and unspeakable was her zeal; therefore He permitted the oil to be poured even on His head”.

“If He didn’t refuse to become man, to be born in the womb, and to be fed at the breast, why do you marvel if He accepts this? Like the Father allowed a sweet savor of meat and smoke (Exodus 29:18, Leviticus 1:9, Numbers 28:2), so did Jesus accept the harlot’s intention (Luke 7:37-38). Jacob also anointed a pillar to God (Genesis 28:18, 31:13); oil was offered in the sacrifices (Leviticus 2:1); and the priests were anointed with ointment” (Exodus 30:22-33).

John Chrysostom celebrates⁶² the eternal memory of the anointing by Mary, and notes that she is remembered above countless kings. In recognizing Mary’s faith, the Lord allowed her to do things out of the zeal of her budding faith that He might not have permitted otherwise.

“While the noble exploits of countless kings and generals have sunk into silence; having overthrown cities, encompassed them with walls, set up trophies, and enslaved many nations, they are not known so much as by hearsay, though they have both set up statues, and established laws. Yet a woman who was a harlot⁶³ poured out oil in the house of some leper, in the presence of ten men; this all men celebrate throughout the world. So great a time has passed, and yet the memory of that which was done has not faded away. But Persians and Indians, Scythians and Thracians, Sarmatians, and the race of the Moors, and they that dwell in the British Islands, spread abroad that which was done secretly in a house by a woman that had been a harlot. Great is the loving-kindness of the Lord. He endures a harlot kissing his feet, and moistening them with oil, and wiping them with her hair, and He receives her, and reproves those that blame her. It was not right that for so much zeal the woman should be driven to despair”.

⁶⁰ We know the woman with the issue of blood today by the name of Veronica.

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXX, 1.

⁶² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXX, 2.

⁶³ Chrysostom identifies Mary of Bethany as a former harlot. This may mean that she had had more than one husband, such as the woman Jesus met at the well in Sychar (John 4:16-18).

“But note this too, how far they were now raised up above the world, and excelled in almsgiving. Why was it He did not merely say, ‘She has done a good work,’ but before this, ‘Why do you trouble the woman?’ That they might learn not to require too much of the weaker sort at the beginning! Therefore neither does He examine the act merely itself by itself, but taking into account the person of the woman. If He had been making a law, He would not have brought in the woman. But that you might learn that for her sake these things were said, that they might not mar her budding faith, but rather cherish it. Therefore He said it, teaching us whatever good thing may be done by any man, though it is not quite perfect, to receive it, encourage it, advance it, and not to seek perfection at the beginning”.

“All men, He said, shall celebrate her hereafter; now she has announced beforehand my passion, by bringing to me what was needed for a funeral; let no man reprove her. I am so far from condemning her as having done amiss, or from blaming her as having not acted rightly, that I will not allow what has been done to be hid, but the world shall know that which has been done in a house, and in secret. The deed came of a reverential mind, fervent faith, and a contrite soul”.

Judas Bargains to Betray Jesus

Immediately after Mary anointed Jesus, Judas sought out the chief priests to betray Jesus. Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts read:

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him (Matthew 26:14-16).

“Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude” (Luke 22:3-6).

John Chrysostom spoke⁶⁴ at length about Judas, pondering how he could do such a thing! What was he thinking? From what he had seen and done and witnessed over the past three years, his deeds make no sense! The only explanation is that something else possessed him, and Chrysostom said that this was covetousness. Jesus was extremely patient with him, even up to the last hour, but to no avail. The least that we can do is to be similarly patient with those in our midst that have the same problem.

“And see how great is the wickedness of Judas, in that he comes to them of his own accord, in that he does this for money and for such a small sum of money”.

“Luke said that he conferred with the chief captains. After that the Jews became seditious, the Romans set over them those that should provide for their good order. Their government had now undergone a change according to the prophecy. Judas was afraid of the multitude, and desired to seize him alone”.

“This is such madness! How did covetousness completely blind him! He that had often seen Him when He went through the midst, and was not seized, and

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXX, 3.

when He gave many demonstrations of His Godhead and power; now he looked for an opportunity to lay hold on Him”.

“Knowing this, then, let us also do all things for them that sin and are careless, warning, teaching, exhorting, admonishing, advising, though we profit nothing. Christ indeed foreknew that the traitor was incorrigible. Yet He did not cease to supply what He could do, as well admonishing as threatening and bewailing over him, and in a concealed way. At the time of the betrayal, He allowed him even to kiss Him (Luke 22:47-48), but this did not benefit Judas at all. So great an evil is covetousness; this made him both a traitor, and a sacrilegious robber”.

“Every day Judas was with Him, who had nowhere to lay His head, and every day he was instructed by deeds and by words, not to have gold, silver, or two coats (Luke 12:33, Mark 10:21, Luke 3:11). Yet he was not taught self-restraint; how do you expect to escape the disease, if you don’t have the benefit of earnest attention, and do not use much diligence? The monster is terrible, yet nevertheless, if you are willing, you will easily get the better of him. The desire is not natural; this is clear from those that are free from it. Natural things are common to everyone; but this desire has its origin from carelessness alone. From this it takes its birth; from this it derives its increase; when it has seized upon those who look greedily after it, it makes them live contrary to nature. When they don’t care about their fellow countrymen, their friends, their brethren, etc., this is to live against nature. Thus it is evident that the vice and disease of covetousness, wherein Judas became a traitor, is contrary to nature. How did he become such a one, you may say, having been called by Christ?”

“Because God’s call is not compulsory, neither does it force the will of them who are not minded to choose virtue, but admonishes and advises, and does all things, so as to persuade men to become good. But if some don’t endure, it does not compel. If you want to learn what caused him to become such as he was, you will find that he was ruined by covetousness”.

“How was he taken by this calamity? Such changes arise from carelessness, as on the other hand, those for the better from diligence. How many for instance that were violent, are now gentler than lambs? How many lascivious persons have become afterwards continent? How many former covetous have now cast away even their possessions? The contrary also has been the result of carelessness. Gehazi also lived with a holy man, and he too became depraved from the same disease (2 Kings 5:15-27). This calamity is the most grievous of all. From covetousness come robbers of tombs, manslayers, wars and fighting, and whatsoever evil you may mention. Someone said, ‘there is nothing more wicked than a covetous man’”.

First Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 2:11-22 “The Rejection of Moses”

In the First Reading, Moses, like Christ, came to his people as the only person qualified to be a prince and a judge, but he was rejected and driven away. The text from Exodus reads:

“And it came to pass in that length of time, that Moses having grown, went out to his brethren the sons of Israel: and having noticed their distress, he saw an Egyptian smiting a certain Hebrew of his brethren the children of Israel. And having looked round this way and that way, he sees no one; and he smote the

Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. And having gone out the second day he saw two Hebrew men fighting; and he said to the injurer, ‘Why do you smite your neighbor?’ And he said, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Will you slay me as you yesterday slew the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was alarmed, and said, ‘If *it be* thus, this matter has become known’. And Pharaoh heard this matter, and sought to slay Moses; and Moses departed from the presence of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian; and having come into the land of Midian, he sat on the well.”

“And the priest of Midian had seven daughters, feeding the flock of their father Jethro; and they came and drew water until they filled their pitchers, to water the flock of their father Jethro. And the shepherds came, and were driving them away; and Moses rose up and rescued them, and drew water for them, and watered their sheep. And they came to Reuel their father; and he said to them, ‘Why have you come so quickly to-day?’ And they said, ‘An Egyptian delivered us from the shepherds, and drew water for us and watered our sheep’. And he said to his daughters, ‘And where is he? And why have you left the man? Call him therefore, that he may eat bread’. And Moses was established with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses to wife. And the woman conceived and bore a son, and Moses called his name Gershom, saying, ‘I am a sojourner in a strange land’” (Exodus 2:11-22 LXX).

Moses’ parents exhibited a great deal of faith at the time that he was born. By faith, they abandoned their son to the Lord’s discretion twice: once to the Nile in a floating basket and once to the daughter of the evil tyrant. And God responded to their faith by providing for Moses in a remarkable way. Not only did he get the best education available (Acts 7:22), but he represented Pharaoh’s only heir, since Thermuthis, Pharaoh’s daughter, was barren. Pharaoh’s magicians⁶⁵ warned Pharaoh against Moses, but Pharaoh disregarded their advice to kill Moses and instead protected him and raised him as the heir to the throne.

As a young man⁶⁶, Moses was placed at the head of the Egyptian army and defeated the Ethiopians, who were advancing into Egypt from the South. This early activity of Moses may be what Stephen, the Protomartyr, referred to saying that Moses “was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22) before he left Egypt at age forty.

After Moses returned as a conquering hero⁶⁷, the magicians entertained a greater hatred of him than before, and were able to sway Pharaoh to beware of him as a military force to be reckoned with. At this same time, the incident occurred where Moses saw an Egyptian taskmaster unjustly beating a Hebrew. Moses struck down the Egyptian and killed him, and buried him in the sand. (From the above accounts, it is apparent that Moses was strong and skilled in military endeavors! The taskmaster had no business even questioning the Commander of the Egyptian army). The next day, Moses came upon two Hebrews fighting. Trying to act as a peacemaker, Moses spoke to them. But one of them replied, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” As heir to the throne, as a conquering hero, and with priestly qualifications, no one was more qualified to be a prince and a judge over them. But like Christ, his people rejected him.

⁶⁵ Josephus, Antiquities, II, ix, 1, 7

⁶⁶ Josephus, Antiquities, II, x, 1-2.

⁶⁷ Josephus, Antiquities, II, xi, 1

When Moses realized that the event had become known, he left Egypt before Pharaoh could find him (Exodus 2:11-15). When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, knowing that his general had now identified with the Hebrews as his magicians said he would; but Pharaoh was too late.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁸ that the “reproach of Christ” (Hebrews 11:26) that Moses received was spoken by his own people, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us?” (Exodus 2:14). By his rank (heir to the throne, general in the Egyptian army), they should have welcomed him with open arms as a prince and a judge. Chrysostom compared this to the reproach Christ received from His own, “He came to His own and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). After they crucified Him, “Those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads: ‘if You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross’” (Matthew 27:39-40). Thus Moses and Christ suffered alike. Moses and Christ alike looked to the reward set for them (Hebrews 11:26, 12:2).

Second Parable from the Old Testament: Job 2:1-10 “The Smiting of Job by Satan”

In the Second Reading, Job portrayed Christ as He was struck down without a cause. The text from Job reads:

“And it came to pass on a certain day that the angels of God came to stand before the Lord, and the devil came among them to stand before the Lord. And the Lord said to the devil, ‘Where have you come from?’ Then the devil said, ‘I am come from going through the world, and walking about the whole earth’. And the Lord said to the devil, ‘Have you then observed my servant Job, that there is none of *men* upon the earth like him, a harmless, true, blameless, godly man, abstaining from all evil? And he yet cleaves to innocence, whereas you have told *me* to destroy his substance without cause?’ And the devil answered and said to the Lord, ‘Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give as a ransom for his life. Put forth your hand, and touch his bones and his flesh: verily he will bless you to *your face*’. And the Lord said to the devil, ‘Behold, I deliver him up to you; only save his life’.

So the devil went out from the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from *his feet* to *his head*. And he took a potsherd to scrape away the discharge, and sat upon a dung-heap outside the city.

And when much time had passed, his wife said to him, ‘How long will you hold out, saying, Behold, I wait yet a little while, expecting the hope of my deliverance? For, behold, your memorial is abolished from the earth, *even your sons and daughters*, the pangs and pains of my womb which I bore in vain with sorrows. And you yourself sit down to spend the nights in the open air among the corruption of worms. And I am a wanderer and a servant from place to place and house to house, waiting for the setting of the sun that I may rest from my labors and my pangs which now beset me. But say some word against the Lord, and die. But he looked on her, and said to her, You have spoken like one of the foolish women. If we have received good things of the hand of the Lord, shall we not endure evil things? In all these things that happened to him, Job sinned not at all with his lips before God” (Job 2:1-10 LXX)

⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVI, 4.

Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. During the Conquest of Canaan, Israel passed by Mt. Seir, Southeast of the Dead Sea (Deuteronomy 2:4-6), which was the home of the descendants of Esau.

This parable from the Old Testament illustrates the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, where Job is a picture of Christ as He was about to go to the Cross. Job's ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth; "a blameless and godly man, abstaining from all evil" (Job 1:8 LXX). In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness. Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children, consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, he would curse God to His face (Job 1:11).

Satan recognized Job's godliness, just as he recognized that of Christ (Matthew 4:1-10). Yet Satan felt that all Job's righteousness could be attributed to the Lord's physical blessings in Job's life. Satan didn't allow for the possibility that Job would actually want to love God. So the Lord allowed Satan to take away all Job's possessions in sifting him.

Job's response to all this was to prepare himself to worship the Lord saying, "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). Meanwhile, the Lord pointed out to Satan that Job held fast to his integrity "even though you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause" (Job 2:3). When the Lord pointed out Job's righteousness, Satan challenged the Lord's judgment (Job 2:3-5). Satan was allowed to afflict Job with every evil imaginable (Job 1:13-19, 2:7-13). Yet Job's words were "Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

All these were "messengers from Satan" (compare 2 Corinthians 12:7) and the next was a severe physical one: skin boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:7). Now destitute and unable to afford any medical attention, Job's only medical alternative was scrapping the pus off his skin with a piece of broken pottery. Completely disfigured by these diseases, Job's wife advised him: "Just say some word against the Lord, and die!" (Job 2:9 LXX). When three of his friends came to see him after hearing of his adversity, they didn't even recognize him at first because of his disfigurement. When they did, they openly wept (Job 2:11-12 LXX). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his affliction was dreadful and very great (Job 2:13 LXX). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

Following this week of silence the last messenger came: the inquisition. Job's three friends thought that Job had some secret sin that brought all this evil down on his own head. Eliphaz, king of the Temanites⁶⁹, suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. When can he remember the pure in heart ever being utterly destroyed? (Job 4:7-8 LXX). Bilhad, sovereign of the Shuhites⁷⁰, suggested that perhaps Job's sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job were pure and true, God would listen to his supplication, and would restore to him the habitation of righteousness. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor will he receive any gift of the ungodly (Job 8:4, 6, 20 LXX). Job claimed he was innocent.

⁶⁹ Teman was the Southern portion of Idumaea.

⁷⁰ The Shuhites were descendants of Shuah, the son of Abraham by Keturah. His descendants were an Arab tribe west of the Euphrates.

Zophar, king of the Mineans⁷¹, suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. “If you have made your heart pure and lifted up your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let unrighteousness lodge in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14 LXX). The effect of all this on Job was that “the tents of the destroyers prosper while the just and blameless man is a joke (Job 12:4, 6).

This last messenger from Satan was perhaps the cruelest and the most difficult to deal with. After all, there was ample evidence all around Job that it was true! Chrysostom commented⁷² that “the reproaches of Job’s friends appeared worse than the worms and the sores. There is nothing more intolerable to those in affliction than a word capable of stinging the soul”. This is exactly what the “messengers of Satan” seek to convince us of also: that God is not faithful, that He doesn’t care about us and that we should only trust in what we can see.

Paul reminds us that the usefulness of our “thorns in the flesh” or “messengers of Satan” are that we don’t get exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7). After all, we are to bear our crosses as our Lord bore His (Mark 8:34-37), and as He humbled Himself to death on the Cross, so should we. The Lord told Paul, and He tells us, “My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Going through all he went through, it’s hard to imagine the Lord’s grace being sufficient for Job; but it was. Paul also said, “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

The Lord saw His Cross, which itself was a messenger of Satan, as His Glory (John 12:23). Job wasn’t aware of what was going on in heaven between the Lord and Satan, but eventually He realized that his ordeal was for his glory also. As a result, Job was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11). Instigating and organizing Job’s crosses and our crosses is Satan, just as he organized Jesus’ Cross (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). Job grew spiritually because of all the evil that he had to bear. Obviously Jesus’ and Job’s Crosses did them no permanent harm.

⁷¹ The Mineans were part of the Kingdom of Sheba (the Sabaeans), from which the Queen of Sheba came (1 Kings 10:4). Their territory is in Yemen today.

⁷² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.