

The Life of Mark the Evangelist

April 25, 2019
Revision C

Gospel: Mark 6:7-13
Epistle: 1 Peter 5:6-14

Many people have confused the Evangelist Mark with another member of the Seventy, John surnamed Mark (Acts 12:12). In addition, there was a third member of the original Seventy Apostles named Mark, who was the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). They are three different individuals who came from different locales and who had much different roles in the Early Church. Modern accounts of these three individuals are often blended together. The Evangelist Mark was originally an idolater¹ from Cyrene of Pentapolis, which is near Libya. He came to the Faith of Christ through the Apostle Peter. John Mark, on the other hand, in addition to being one of the original Seventy Apostles, was born at Jerusalem², and the house of his mother Mary (Acts 12:12) adjoined the Garden of Gethsemane. John Mark was later Bishop of Byblos in Phoenicia just north of Beirut on the Mediterranean coast. Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, was³ also one of the original Seventy Apostles and was later the Bishop of Apollonia in Samaria, just north of Joppa on the Mediterranean coast. Since Barnabas was native to Cyprus (Acts 4:36), Mark, his cousin, probably was also native to Cyprus. After Pentecost, the Evangelist Mark accompanied the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13), much as the Evangelist Luke accompanied the Apostle Paul. John Mark, on the other hand, accompanied the Apostles Paul and Barnabas on their First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:5, 13), and later worked with Barnabas on Cyprus (Acts 15:39). Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, later worked with the Apostle Paul (Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11) toward the end of Paul's missionary work.

The Evangelist Mark versus John Mark versus Mark the Cousin of Barnabas

That the three men couldn't be the same person is illustrated by the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo, a native of Alexandria. Sometime before his death in 50 AD, Philo wrote⁴ a short work praising the work of the Evangelist Mark in Alexandria and the lives of the monks in the monasteries Mark started. At the same time that Philo was visiting the Evangelist Mark's monasteries in Egypt, John Mark was leaving Antioch to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their First Missionary Journey. Jerome stated⁵ that Philo saw in the monasteries of Egypt something of credit to his nation, since there was still a distinct Jewish flavor to their life together.

Copyright © Mark Kern 2018

¹ For details, see www.goarch.org, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese website for April 25th.

² For details, see www.oca.org, the Orthodox Church in America website for April 25th.

³ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2002, October 30.

Hippolytus, "On the Seventy Apostles", Ante-Nicene Fathers, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, v. 5
Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 30.
<http://oca.org/FSlives.asp> for October 30.

⁴ C. D. Yonge, tr., "On the Contemplative Life", The Works of Philo, Updated Edition Database, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, II:10 to IV:39.

⁵ Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men", Chapter 8, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

Table of Contents

The Evangelist Mark versus John Mark versus Mark the Cousin of Barnabas	1
The Drafting of Mark’s Gospel	5
Reasons for Drafting the Gospel.....	5
Content of Mark’s Gospel.....	7
Mark’s Early Missionary Work	10
The Beginning of the Church in Rome	10
Mark Leaves for Rome in the mid 40’s	11
Mark Finds the Church in Alexandria	12
Mark’s Apostolic Predecessors in Egypt	12
The Beginning of the Work of the Evangelist Mark in Egypt	14
Personal Details of the Work of Mark in Egypt.....	14
The Evangelist Mark Travels Throughout Egypt	16
Alexandria as the Seat of Christian Learning	16
Monasteries of the Alexandrian Church	18
The Apostles Ordain Lent	20
Angelic Visitors to the Monasteries of Alexandria	21
Later Developments of the Monasteries of Egypt.....	22
Mark Travels to Jerusalem for the Funeral of the Virgin Mary	23
The Liturgy of St. Mark for the Church in Alexandria	25
The Martyrdom of the Evangelist Mark	29
The Extent of the Influence of the Church of Alexandria.....	31
Gospel: Mark 6:7-13.....	32
Performing Miracles Does not Guarantee Salvation.....	33
Taking Nothing for the Journey.....	38
Ascetics Still Follow this Command.....	38
Staying with the People They Meet	39
There Are Those Who Hoard Material Things	39
Desiring to be Perfect.....	41
Shaking Off the Dust of Their Feet.....	42
More Tolerable for Sodom at Judgment Day.....	43
Anointing with Oil	46
Use of Holy Oil for Healing.....	46
Use of Holy Oil at Baptism.....	47
Epistle: 1 Peter 5:6-14	50
Background for Peter’s First Epistle	50
Silvanus of the Seventy, the Courier of the Epistle.....	51
What is Babylon?.....	51
The Date for the Writing of Peter’s First Epistle	53
The Necessity for Humility.....	54
Practical Examples of Humility	57
Our Enemy is Like a Roaring Lion.....	59
We Will All Suffer.....	62
What Do the Scriptures Say?	64
Christ’s Sufferings as a Model.....	66
The Sufferings of Job	69
Suffering on Behalf of Christ	72
Suffering during Sickness Is Also Suffering for Christ.....	77
The Purpose of Suffering	79
Suffering is a Result of the Fall of Adam.....	82
The Forgiveness of Our Sins.....	83
Why Do Some Suffer and Others Don’t?.....	84
Practical Aspects of Suffering.....	87
Suffering Unjustly	88
A Great Good Results	90
Christians Share in Each Other’s Suffering.....	93
How We Achieve Martyrdom in a Time of Peace	95
How Do We Know When to Run and When to Suffer?.....	98

The Kiss of Peace	100
Misuse of the Kiss of Peace	102
Readings from James 1:1 to 2:13.....	104
The Usefulness of the Wisdom Literature of the Scriptures	104
The Double-Minded.....	105
The Unstable.....	107
Enduring Temptation	109
Understanding Our Place with God	113
The Father of Lights.....	113
The Word of Truth.....	115
First-Fruits of His Creatures	116
What God Seeks of Us.....	120
Slow to Speak	121
The Righteousness of God.....	123
What We Must Do	126
Doers, not just Hearers of the Word	126
The Law of Liberty.....	128
How the Mosaic Law Fits	130
Partiality.....	131
The Whole Law	132
Without Mercy.....	135
Trampling Underfoot the Son of God	135
Seeking Out the Mercy of God	137

“Philo, most learned of the Jews, seeing the first church at Alexandria still Jewish in a degree, wrote a book on their manner of life as something of credit to his nation. He recorded what he saw was done at Alexandria, under the learned Mark, as being very similar to what Luke says, the believers had all things in common at Jerusalem”.

As further proof that the three Marks are different individuals, the Evangelist Mark was martyred⁶ in Alexandria in the 8th year of Nero, or 61 AD. Yet Paul wrote to Timothy in 67 AD, just before his own martyrdom, to get Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, and bring him to Rome (2 Timothy 4:11). Later in his life John Mark attained great boldness before God, so that his very shadow healed the sick⁷, just like Peter’s shadow had in earlier years (Acts 5:15).

Other testimony that they were different individuals includes Hippolytus⁸, Nickolai Velimirovic⁹, and Demetrius of Rostov¹⁰. There are the names of two Apostles named Mark listed in the Byzantine, Greek and Russian Menaion for January 4th, the Feast Day for the Seventy, and

⁶ Eusebius Pamphilius, Church History, II, 24.

Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men”, Chapter 8, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

⁷ <http://oca.org/FSlives.asp> for September 27.

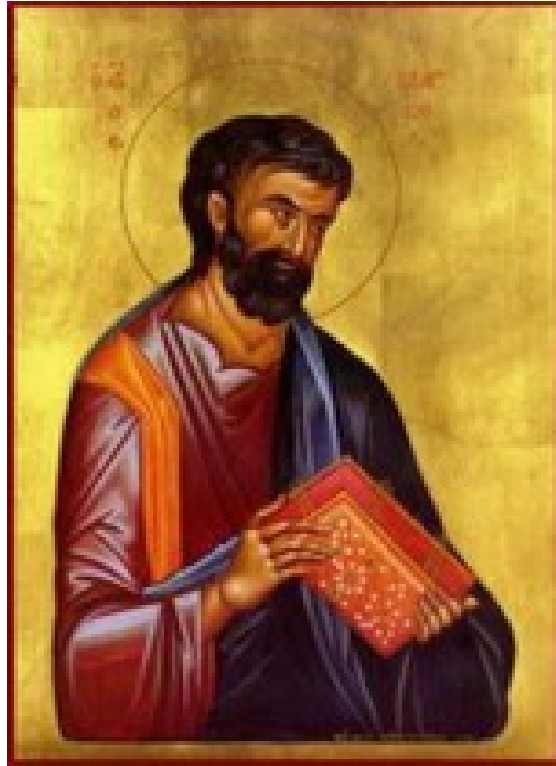
The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2002, September 27.

⁸ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5, portrays both Mark’s as members of the Seventy.

⁹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986 gives the Feast Day of April 25 for the Evangelist Mark, and September 27 and October 30 for John Mark.

¹⁰ Demetrius of Rostov, “The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints”, January 4, tr. by Fr.Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2002. Two Apostles named Mark are commemorated on the Feast Day for the Seventy, January 4th.

they are referred to by the St. Sabbas Typicon (6th century). Both are also included in the Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Forna¹¹ as different individuals.



The Evangelist Mark¹²

Perhaps much of this confusion between the three Mark's comes from the New Testament apocryphal work¹³ "The Acts of Barnabas", written by John Mark, which describes Barnabas' work on Cyprus, and which ends with the martyrdom of Barnabas on Cyprus¹⁴ in c. 61 AD. At the end of the account, the author states that he left for Alexandria, but gives no connection to any work with the Apostle Peter. Thus both the Evangelist Mark and John Mark may have been in Alexandria for a short time, but doing different things.

Papias, the Early Apostolic Church Father (60-130 AD), stated¹⁵ that the Evangelist Mark "neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. He accompanied the Apostle Peter, who taught based on the needs of his hearers, and Mark drafted his Gospel based on the Apostle Peter's teachings, but not as a chronological narrative of the Lord's life".

Hippolytus, another Early Church Father (170-236 AD), stated¹⁶ that the Evangelist Mark had a maimed finger. However, this maimed finger does not show up clearly in any of the extant

¹¹ Paul Hetherington, tr, The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Forna, Oakwood Publications, Torrance, CA 90505, 1981, pp. 52-53.

¹² See www.goarch.org, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese website for April 25th

¹³ "The Acts of Barnabas", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

¹⁴ Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd Ed., Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 134.

¹⁵ Fragments of Papias, 5, in Roberts and Donaldson, "The Apostolic Fathers", The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1.

¹⁶ Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies, VII, 18.

icons of the Evangelist Mark, such as illustrated in Figure 1. According to tradition¹⁷, Mark was referred to as “stump-fingered”, but no information is available as to what caused this.

Hippolytus also listed¹⁸ both the Evangelist Mark, Mark the cousin of Barnabas and John Mark as among the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20) that the Lord sent out ahead of Him in the last year of His public ministry.

Hippolytus further stated¹⁹ that both the Evangelists Mark and Luke were among those who were offended by Jesus when He stated,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:53-58).

Mark and Luke were scattered by the offense of the word which Christ spoke (John 6:66). But the one was induced to return to the Lord by Peter’s instrumentality, and the other by Paul’s. They were honored to preach that Gospel on account of which they also suffered martyrdom; the Evangelist Mark was burned to death, while John Mark was crucified on an olive tree.

According to Church Tradition, on the night that Christ was betrayed, the Evangelist Mark followed Him to the Garden of Gethsemane, wrapped only in a linen cloth²⁰. When Mark was seized by soldiers, he fled away naked, leaving the cloth behind (Mark 14:51-52).

The Drafting of Mark’s Gospel

Reasons for Drafting the Gospel

Clement of Alexandria stated²¹ that Mark drafted his Gospel at the persistent request of the people in Rome that heard Peter preach. They wanted a written account of what Peter had said.

¹⁷ Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 874, quoting Hippolytus and others.

¹⁸ Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 14, in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

¹⁹ Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 14, in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

²⁰ According to tradition, the young man was the Evangelist Mark himself, who lived nearby, and who was roused out of bed by the commotion. See April 25th for the Lives of the Saints at the web site www.oca.org. According to the web site www.celticchristianity.org, Mark’s simple wrap indicates that he probably went out of the house that was in the garden when he heard the multitude arrive in the middle of the night. Ancient tradition states that this part of the Garden of Gethsemane belonged to the family of St. Mark.

²¹ Clement of Alexandria, “From the Catena on Luke Edited by Corderius”, in Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ed. Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2. Quoted by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, II, 15.

Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, II, 8, in Jerome and Gennadius, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 3.

Clement of Alexandria, “Fragments” 1, From the Latin Translation of Cassiodorus, Comments on 1 Peter, 1, in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 2.

Peter heard about this, approved Mark's Gospel, and authorized the Reading of the Gospel of Mark in the Churches. Clement stated:

“Such a ray of godliness shone forth on the minds of Peter's hearers, that they were not satisfied with the once hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine proclamation, but with all manner of entreaties asked Mark, to whom the Gospel is ascribed, he being the companion of Peter, that he would leave in writing a record of the teaching which had been delivered to them verbally. They did not let the man alone till they prevailed upon him; and so to them we owe the Scripture called the ‘Gospel by Mark’. On learning what had been done, through the revelation of the Spirit, it is said that the Apostle Peter was delighted with the enthusiasm of the men, and sanctioned the composition for reading in the Churches. Clement gives the narrative in the Sixth Book²² of the Hypotyposes”.

Eusebius interpreted²³ the Apostle Peter's remarks about “Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13) as a reference to the drafting of Mark's Gospel in the city of Rome.

“Peter makes mention of Mark in his first Epistle, which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon, as he does in the following words. ‘The Church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, salutes you; and so does Mark my son’”.

Papias (60-130 AD) referred²⁴ to the Evangelist Mark as “the interpreter of the Apostle Peter”. By “interpreter”, he does not mean that Peter could not communicate with people who didn't speak Hebrew. The Apostle Peter, like the Evangelist Mark, had the gift of speaking in tongues that they received at Pentecost. The way this gift worked was described by Rufinus of Aquilea²⁵.

“After Pentecost, they were enabled to speak a variety of different languages such that they found no nation strange to them and no foreign speech beyond their comprehension”

As “interpreter” of Peter, the Evangelist Mark wrote down accurately whatever he remembered from Peter's preaching. He did not write down the sayings or deeds of Christ in the exact order that they happened. Eusebius stated²⁶ that Mark composed his Gospel per Peter's instructions, which implies that there was some editing that occurred after Mark's first draft. Irenaeus stated²⁷ that “Mark handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter, but that this occurred after Peter's departure”.

²² The Hypotyposes of Clement of Alexandria have been lost. All that is extant are fragments that were quoted by other writers.

²³ Eusebius, Church History, II, 15.

²⁴ Fragments of Papias, 5, in Roberts and Donaldson, “The Apostolic Fathers”, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1. Eusebius, Church History, III, 39. Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, II, 1, in Jerome and Gennadius, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 3.

²⁵ Rufinus of Aquilea, “Commentary on the Apostles' Creed”, Schaff and Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series v.3.

²⁶ Eusebius, Church History, VI, 25.

²⁷ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, I, 1. Eusebius, Church History, V, 8.

Some manuscripts of Mark's Gospel add the following sentences at the end of Chapter 16, verse 20:

“And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from East to West the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation”.

Clement of Alexandria also stated²⁸ that the order of the drafting of the four Gospels is the same as their order appears in modern Bibles; that is, Matthew first and John last.

“The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it”.

From the above, we can obtain an approximate date for the drafting of the Gospel of Mark. He wrote his Gospel when the Apostle Peter was still in Rome, which was in the mid-40's AD. We can get a rough check on this by looking carefully at when Luke wrote his Gospel. Luke ended his account of the travels of Paul with Paul still under house-arrest in Rome, which ended in c. 62 AD. Luke wrote his Gospel a few years before he wrote Acts, or about 58 AD. Thus we can see that this lines up with Clement's understanding. Matthew wrote his Gospel before leaving on his missionary journeys in the early 30's. Mark drafted his Gospel in the mid 40's, and John wrote his Gospel toward the end of the 1st Century. The order of the Gospels reflects the order of their writing.

Content of Mark's Gospel

The Evangelist Mark began and ended his Gospel with a reference to what the Prophets had said about Christ. He began with a reference to Isaiah and Malachi, and ended with a reference to David. Irenaeus noted²⁹ this as follows:

“Mark, the interpreter and follower of Peter, began his Gospel narrative: ‘The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight before our God’ (Mark 1:2-3, Isaiah 40:3 LXX, Malachi 3:1). Plainly the commencement of the Gospel quotes the words of the holy prophets, and points out Him at once, whom they confessed as God and Lord. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had promised Him that He would send His messenger before His face, who was John, crying in the wilderness, in ‘the spirit and power of Elijah’ (Luke 1:17, Matthew 11:14), ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths before our God’ (Isaiah 40:3 LXX). For the prophets announced one and the same God, under various aspects, and many titles. For varied and rich in attribute is the Father”.

“Towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: ‘So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, “From the Catena on Luke Edited by Corderius”, in Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ed. Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2.

Quoted by Eusebius Pamphilus, Church History, VI, 14.

²⁹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, x, 5.

right hand of God' (Mark 16:19). This confirmed what had been spoken by the prophet: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"' (Psalm 110:1). Thus God and the Father are truly one and the same; He who was announced by the prophets, and handed down by the true Gospel; we Christians worship and love Him with the whole heart, as the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things".

Irenaeus compared³⁰ the four Gospels to the four living creatures in the books of Ezekiel and Revelation. Other writers such as Augustin and Victorinus have expressed different links to these creatures³¹. Irenaeus said that Matthew's Gospel corresponded to the man; Mark's, to the flying eagle; Luke's, to the calf that was slain, and John's, to the lion.

"It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. Since the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the 'pillar and ground' of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side. The Word, the Creator of all, He that sits upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was revealed to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit. As David says, when entreating His manifestation, 'You that sit between the cherubim, shine forth' (Psalm 80:1). For the cherubim, too, were four-faced, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God. As the Scripture says (Ezekiel 1:8-10, 10:14, Revelation 4:7), 'The first living creature was like a lion', symbolizing His effectual working, His leadership, and royal power. The second living creature was like a calf, signifying His sacrificial and sacerdotal order. But 'the third had, as it were, the face as of a man' — an evident description of His advent as a human being. 'The fourth was like a flying eagle', pointing out the gift of the Spirit hovering with His wings over the Church".

"The Gospels are in accord with these things, among which Christ Jesus is seated. For the Gospel according to John relates His original, effectual, and glorious generation from the Father, thus declaring, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). Also, 'all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made' (John 1:3). For this reason, too, is John's Gospel full of confidence, like the royal presence of a lion, for such is His person".

"But that according to Luke, taking up His priestly character, like a calf about to be slain, commenced with Zachariah the priest offering sacrifice to God. For now was made ready the fatted calf, about to be immolated for the finding again of the younger son" (Luke 15:32).

"Matthew relates His generation as a man, saying, 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matthew 1:1); and also, 'The birth of Jesus Christ was as follows' (Matthew 1:18). This, then, is

³⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xi, 8.

³¹ Augustin, Harmony of the Gospels, I, vi, 9 identified Matthew with the lion due to his emphasis on Jesus' descent from kings and John with the eagle due to his soaring theological understanding. That left him with Mark depicting the man since Mark's accounts did not emphasize the royal or priestly aspects of Jesus' life. Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John, Chapter 4, 7-10 on the other hand, agreed with Irenaeus on Matthew and Luke, but likened Mark to the lion due to his reference to "crying in the wilderness" (Mark 1:3) where lions lived. Irenaeus seems to express more depth in understanding the Gospel of Mark than do Augustin and Victorinus.

the Gospel of His humanity; for which reason it is that the character of a humble and meek man is kept up through the whole Gospel”.

“Mark, on the other hand, commences with a reference to the prophetic spirit coming down from on high to men, saying, ‘The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet’ (Mark 1:1-2), pointing to the winged aspect of the Gospel, like a flying eagle. On this account he made a compendious and cursory narrative, for such is the prophetic character”.

“The Word of God Himself used to converse with the ante-Mosaic Patriarchs, in accordance with His divinity and glory; but for those under the Law he instituted a sacerdotal and liturgical service. Afterwards, being made man for us, He sent the gift of the celestial Spirit over all the earth, protecting us with His wings. As was the course followed by the Son of God, so was also the form of the living creatures. And such as was the form of the living creatures, so was also the character of the Gospel. For the living creatures are quadriform, and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race:

1. Prior to the Deluge, under Adam
2. After the Deluge, under Noah
3. The giving of the Law, under Moses
4. That which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom”.

In Mark’s Gospel, there is internal evidence of Peter’s editing, where Peter, in his humility, had Mark delete accounts that glorified himself, but yet let him include accounts of his weakness.

For example, Matthew recorded an incident in his Gospel where Jesus paid the Temple Tax³². Jesus had Peter cast a hook into the Sea of Galilee, and the first fish that he caught would have a piece of money in its mouth. Jesus instructed Peter to use that money to pay the Temple Tax for both of them (Matthew 17:24-27). This was an incredible miracle that showed Jesus’ complete mastery over the sea, everything in it and the order of events. This was quite an honor for Peter also that Jesus would do this for him.

While Matthew recorded this event, Mark did not, even though Mark was the constant companion of Peter. John Chrysostom noted³³ that it was rather significant for Mark to omit this event, since Mark did not omit details of Peter’s denial (Mark 14:66-72)! Chrysostom concluded that Peter, out of humility, asked Mark to omit the things that made him look good, but let him include the things that showed his weakness. Chrysostom stated:

“Regarding the incident of the Temple Tax, Mark, the follower of this Apostle, did not set it down, because it indicated the great honor paid to Peter. But regarding Peter’s denial, he did write about it. The things that made him illustrious, Mark passed over in silence, his master perhaps entreating him not to mention the great things about himself. And Jesus used the phrase, ‘for Me and you’. Now as you are amazed at Christ’s power, so I ask you to admire also the disciple’s faith, that to a thing beyond possibility he listened to. For it was very far beyond

³² 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”.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LVIII, 2.

possibility by nature to find money in a fish's mouth. In answering for his faith, He joined him to Himself in the payment of the tribute”.

Chrysostom also pointed out³⁴ that the Evangelist Mark, a disciple of Peter and one of the Seventy, declares his master's weakness in more detail than the rest, since he learned this from Peter himself.

“But Mark said, that when he had once denied, then first the cock crew, but when he denied Him for the third time, then the cock crew for the second time. For he declares more particularly the weakness of the disciple, and that he was utterly dead with fear; having learned these things of his master himself, for he was a follower of Peter. In which respect one would most marvel at him, that so far from hiding his teacher's faults, he declared it more distinctly than the rest on this very account, that he was his disciple”.

Mark's Early Missionary Work

The Evangelist Mark developed a close relationship with the Apostle Peter in the days following Pentecost, and he followed Peter similar to the way the Evangelist Luke followed the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Prochorus (of the Seventy) followed the Apostle John. There are numerous references documenting the Evangelist Mark as being a disciple³⁵ and “spokesman” for the Apostle Peter. Just as with Luke and Prochorus, everywhere Peter went, the Evangelist Mark went also. This formed a foundation for the drafting of Mark's Gospel, since he used Peter's words in his preaching as the basis for his text.

The Beginning of the Church in Rome

At Pentecost, 30 AD, when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, there had been visitors in Jerusalem from Rome, both Jews and Gentile converts (Acts 2:10). Many of these visitors stayed and made up part of the 3000 that were added to the Church as a result of Peter's preaching (Acts 2:41). One year later, at the stoning of Stephen, the Church was scattered due to the bloodbath in Jerusalem (Acts 8:4). While the Scripture records just the stoning of Stephen one year after Pentecost, in actuality, two hundred others were also stoned³⁶ that same day, including deacon Nicanor (Acts 6:5). Thus, people were leaving town to avoid a major bloodbath organized by the Jewish leaders. Those who had come to Jerusalem from Rome, and stayed after Pentecost, may have returned to Rome at this time.

Things were so stressful that Nicodemus, who had defended Jesus before fellow members of the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-52), died as he was mourning the death of Stephen, and he was buried in Gamaliel's tomb. Nicodemus was an old man at the time, and he had also helped Joseph of Arimathea with the burial rite of Jesus (John 19:38-42).

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXV, 1.

³⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, I, 1.

Clement of Alexandria, “Comments on the First Epistle of Peter”, Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2.

Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 5.

³⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene, who was quite wealthy, had traveled on her own to Rome to appear before Tiberias Caesar and tell him the whole story of Pilate's unjust trial of Jesus, his release of a murderer-insurrectionist and his cowering to the Jewish leaders. As a result of this, Pilate was summoned to Rome, was unable to defend his actions and was banished to Gaul where he later committed suicide. Mary Magdalene stayed in Rome for a long time working as an evangelist before moving to Ephesus in the 60's AD to work with the Apostle John. Mary was a pioneer for the Church in Rome. In doing this, she would have had to liquidate all her wealth along with the others after Pentecost (Acts 4:34-37).

Mark Leaves for Rome in the mid 40's

In the Days of Unleavened Bread, 44 AD³⁷, James the son of Zebedee was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I and Peter was imprisoned, expecting the same fate after Passover. Peter was released from prison by an angel (Acts 12:1-17), and headed North to Antioch, taking the Evangelist Mark with him. Eventually they made their way to Rome.

After Peter arrived in Rome, Mary stayed to continue helping the Church, and Paul addressed her by name in his Epistle (Romans 16:5). In that Epistle, dated about 55 AD, Paul also addressed 18 members of the original Seventy Apostles (Romans 16:3-23), who had been sent to Rome by Peter and Paul to aid in the work Mary started. Mary Magdalene came to be called "Equal to the Apostles" for her role in the young church, primarily in Rome and later in Ephesus with the Apostle John.

Thus when Peter and the Evangelist Mark arrived in Rome, there were a number of believers already there and organized by Mary Magdalene. There was a core group who were familiar with the Apostles, and who had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and who had lived in the Church in Jerusalem for a while, where everyone had all things in common

One of the first places that the Apostle Peter sent the Evangelist Mark after their arrival in Rome was to the city of Aquilea (near Venice). Mark's excursion to Aquilea became significant hundreds of years later, after the Islamic Conquest of Egypt, when his relics were moved away from Alexandria to prevent desecration; they were moved to Aquilea.

After spending a short time in Aquilea, the Apostle Peter ordained the Evangelist Mark as Bishop, and sent him go to Alexandria in Egypt. According to tradition, he stopped at his hometown of Pentapolis and cities nearby first. From the Prologue³⁸ of Ochrid:

"Mark was chosen by the Apostle Peter to be a bishop and was sent to Egypt to preach. Egypt was oppressed by the thick darkness of paganism, idolatry, divination and malice. With the help of God, the Evangelist Mark succeeded in sowing the seed of the knowledge of God in Libya, Ammonicia and Pentapolis. From Pentapolis, he went to Alexandria where the Spirit of God led him".

At some time in the late 40's AD, Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Because of this, the Apostle Paul ran into the Apostle Aquila (of the Seventy) and his wife Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), where Paul, Aquila and Priscilla worked together for a number of years

³⁷ Unger gives the date of Herod's death as 44 AD. See Merrill Unger, Unger's Dible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 486.

³⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 25.

after this. This edict by the Emperor, expelling the Jews, may have been the occasion for Peter sending the Evangelist Mark to Egypt.

Mark Finds the Church in Alexandria

There are numerous references, a few included here³⁹, documenting the sending of the Evangelist Mark to Alexandria by the Apostle Peter to raise up the Church there, since he was a disciple⁴⁰ and “spokesman” for Peter.

It is difficult to date the exact year that the Apostle Peter sent Mark to Egypt to preach the Gospel. One account quotes⁴¹ Eutychius, patriarch of Alexandria, as saying this occurred in the 9th year of the Emperor Claudius, or 49 AD. However, this may have occurred earlier than 49 AD. The Jewish philosopher Philo visited some of the monasteries that the Evangelist Mark established, and wrote⁴² a short article expressing his admiration for these communities. [More about this later.] If Philo died in 50 AD, after reporting a great number of monasteries in the neighborhood of Alexandria, it may have taken Mark more than a year to get these monasteries started. However, a number of the monks had been in Jerusalem after Pentecost (Acts 2:10) only to return to Egypt during the persecution. Having a history of living together under the Apostles, they may have been able to develop monastic communities quicker than we might realize.

On the other hand, they could have gotten started earlier. Jerome stated⁴³ that Peter left for Rome in the 2nd year of Claudius, or 42 AD. Others state that Peter left Jerusalem in the year of Herod Agrippa’s death, which was the year 44 AD. Sometime during this interval 42 AD to 49 AD, the Evangelist Mark went to Rome at the direction of the Apostle Peter, where the people of Rome encouraged him to write his Gospel, before he was sent to Egypt.

Mark’s Apostolic Predecessors in Egypt

The Evangelist Mark was not the first of the Apostles to go to Egypt. After Pentecost, the Twelve made preparations for their various missionary journeys, and cast lots to divide up the world into regions⁴⁴ where each of the Twelve had one lot. The lot for James the son of Alphaeus included Egypt, but may have included other areas of the world as well. Also during this first year, Matthew had finished writing his Gospel in Hebrew⁴⁵, and the Twelve had finished drafting⁴⁶ what

³⁹ Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, V, 1.

Gregory the Great, Epistles, Book VI, 60.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, I, 1.

Clement of Alexandria, “Comments on the First Epistle of Peter”, Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2.

Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 5.

⁴¹ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, p. 247.

This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Synodal Press, Moscow, 1906, v. 8, (April) pp. 403-416.

⁴² C. D. Yonge, tr., “On the Contemplative Life”, The Works of Philo, Updated Edition Database, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, II:10 to IV:39.

⁴³ Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men”, Chapter 1, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

⁴⁴ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 6, October 9, November 30.

⁴⁵ For details of Matthew’s draft of his Gospel in Hebrew, see the separate study on the life of Matthew.

⁴⁶ Rufinus, A Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, v. 3.

was later called “The Apostles’ Creed”. The Creed was a common statement of the Faith that they and their successors could use as a metric, since they realized that they may never see each other again.

A brief summary⁴⁷ of the work of James the son of Alphaeus in Egypt notes that there was a great deal of conflict with pagans such that James was crucified in Egypt.

“Aflame with the fire of divine zeal, he burned up the thorns of ungodliness, smashed idols to pieces, destroyed their temples, healed diverse illnesses, drove evil spirits out of people, and brought a great multitude of people to Christ. For this he acquired for himself a new name, the ‘Divine Seed’. Because he sowed the seed of the Word of God in men's hearts, planted faith and grew piety, he was called the ‘Divine Seed’. Going about many lands, he sowed the seed of heaven, and ended his earthly course in the steps of Christ. Being an emulator of the sufferings of Christ, he surrendered his spirit into the hands of God while nailed to a cross in Egypt.”

Another traditional account⁴⁸ of James’ missionary work reads as follows.

“After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it fell to the lot of the Apostle James to preach Christ’s Gospel in Eleutheropolis (i.e. Greece) and the surrounding area, and then in Egypt, where he suffered for his Savior. With great power, both in word and in act, James spread abroad the saving news of the incarnate Word of God, rooting out idol worship, driving demons out of men, healing all manner of sickness and disease in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. His labors and his zeal were crowned with great success. Many pagans came to believe in Christ the Lord, Churches were founded and set in order, and priests and Bishops were made. He suffered in Egypt in the town of Ostracina⁴⁹, being crucified by the pagans”.

The Apostle Nathanael (or Bartholomew) also spent a short time in Egypt. Nathanael’s early missionary journeys have not been well documented, and we know considerably more about his later missionary journeys, both when he traveled with the Apostle Philip (of the Twelve) and by himself. The Roman Martyrology states⁵⁰ that during his early missionary journeys, he preached in Egypt for a time, as did some of the other Apostles. From a fragment of the writings of an unknown author⁵¹ of the late 2nd Century, Pantaenus of Alexandria “became a zealous missionary to the Oriental Ethiopia, and found there the traces of Matthias’ labors, and those also of Nathanael. Pantaenus returned from this mission about 192 AD”.

⁴⁷ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 218-220. This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Moscow, Synodal Press, 1904, v. 2, (October) pp. 166-167.

⁴⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 9.

⁴⁹ Ostracina is at the Eastern side of the Nile Delta, right on the Mediterranean Coast, where Alexandria is on the Western side of the Nile Delta. See www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/mad/legends/legends131.html for a detailed location.

⁵⁰ Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, August 24.

⁵¹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Pantaenus, the Alexandrian Philosopher, Introduction”, Remains of the Second and Third Centuries, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

The Beginning of the Work of the Evangelist Mark in Egypt

One characteristic difference between the missionary work of the Twelve versus that of the Seventy is that the Twelve continued traveling their whole lives, while the Seventy were more fixed to one locale as Bishop. Most of the Seventy follow this pattern, but there are a few exceptions, such as the Evangelist Luke. The work of James the son of Alphaeus and Nathanael in Egypt, where they continued traveling widely, followed by the Evangelist Mark, who was more closely associated with Alexandria and vicinity, seems to fit this pattern.

Concerning the difficulty that Mark faced with Egyptian idolatry when he arrived in Alexandria, Jerome remarked⁵² that, “No nation was so given to idolatry and worshipped such a countless number of monsters as the Egyptians”.

To get a perspective of the significance of the Church in Alexandria that resulted from his efforts, we must remember what Alexandria was like in the 1st Century. It was a seat of great learning, and it had a very large Jewish population. Its rulers were receptive to Christianity, and Pharaoh Ptolemy was the one who had commissioned the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the 3rd Century BC. His purpose was to make the Hebrew Scriptures available to the large Jewish population in Egypt, who didn’t speak Hebrew. He assembled seventy scholars to do this, and therefore the translation is called the Septuagint or the LXX. It was this version of the Old Testament that was used exclusively by the Early Church throughout the world.

One account⁵³ of Mark’s work at the time of his arrival in Alexandria reads as follows:

“In Alexandria, he succeeded in establishing the Church of God, in giving her bishops, priests and deacons and in rooting everything firmly in faithfulness and devotion. Mark confirmed his preaching with many great miracles. When the pagans brought accusations against Mark, as a destroyer of their idolatrous faith, and when the governor of the city began to search for Mark, he fled to Pentapolis, where he continued his earlier work. After two years, Mark again returned to Alexandria to the great joy of all his faithful, whose number had already increased greatly”.

Personal Details of the Work of Mark in Egypt

Another account⁵⁴ of Mark’s arrival in Alexandria gives some personal interaction of Mark with a local cobbler. As Mark arrived in the Alexandria neighborhood, at a place called Medion, his sandal split in two. He took this to be a favorable omen, and went to a nearby cobbler shop to get his sandal repaired. While working on Mark’s sandal, the cobbler accidentally ran his awl through his hand; crying out in pain, the cobbler called on the Name of God. Hearing this exclamation, Mark rejoiced in spirit, seeing that the Lord was laying out before him a good path.

⁵² Jerome, The Life of Paulus, the First Hermit, 8.

Jerome, Against Jovinianus, II, 7.

⁵³ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 25.

⁵⁴ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, p. 247.

This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Synodal Press, Moscow, 1906, v. 8, (April) pp. 403-416.

The wound in the cobbler's hand was very painful, and he was losing a lot of blood. Mark, remembering what Jesus had done (John 9:6), spit on the ground to make clay, and anointed the cobbler's hand. As he did this, he said, "In the Name of Jesus Christ, Who lives forever, be whole!" Immediately, the cobbler's wound closed up and his hand was healed.

The cobbler was completely stunned at such power in the man standing before him and in the effects of his words. Mark's presence, and the purity and sanctity of his life, had already been apparent. The cobbler begged that Mark come to his house for the evening meal, and stay the night, in appreciation for the mercy that he had shown to his servant, the cobbler. Mark joyfully consented and said, "May the Lord bestow on you the Bread of Life, the Bread of Heaven!"

The cobbler joyfully led Mark to his home. Entering into the house, Mark said, "May the blessing of the Lord be upon this place! Brethren, let us pray to God". Mark was following Jesus' instruction for both the Twelve and the Seventy in doing this. When they entered a house to stay at, Jesus had said to "let your peace come upon that household" (Matthew 10:13, Luke 10:5). If the household was worthy, or if a son of peace was there, their peace would rest upon that household. If not, their peace would return to them and it would be more tolerable on Judgment Day for Sodom than for that house or that city. This "peace" was incorporated⁵⁵ into the Church Liturgy in the 1st Century, where the presiding presbyter or bishop would say, "Peace be to all", and the people would respond, "And to your spirit!" This is an Apostolic blessing and, in similar fashion, it will be more tolerable on Judgment Day for Sodom than for that Church that rejects the Apostolic blessing.

After praying, when everyone reclined at table, the cobbler initiated the conversation by saying, "Father, who are you? And where did you get the power that is in your speech?" Mark replied, "I am the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God". The cobbler said, "I would like to see this Son of God". Mark replied that he would show Him to them. Then beginning with the Gospel and the Prophets, Mark explained how they all foretold concerning Christ. The cobbler replied that he had never heard of the Hebrew Scriptures, only the Iliad, the Odyssey, and what Egyptian youths are taught. Mark continued to show him clearly that all the wisdom of the world is foolish in the sight of God.

The cobbler, whose name was Ananias, believed all that Mark told him, and beholding the miracles that Mark performed, accepted baptism. His whole household was also baptized, along with a great multitude of people in that area. Day by day, the number of the faithful increased.

Eventually, the rulers of the city of Medion became aware that Mark's work was hindering the sacrifices customarily offered to their gods, and that he was "blaspheming" their idols. They sought to murder this "foreigner" and gathered together to take counsel on how to arrest him.

Mark learned of their decision, and hurriedly ordained Ananias as Bishop for the faithful, and three priests (Malchus, Sabinus and Cedronus), along with seven deacons and eleven lesser clergymen for the ministry of the Church. Then he left town and went back to Pentapolis. Mark spent two years in Pentapolis, confirming the brethren in the Faith, ordaining Bishops, priests and clergymen for the surrounding regions and cities before returning to Alexandria.

⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 9.

On his return, he found that the brethren had increased in number and excelled in grace and faith in the Lord. Ananias had also built a Church building near the sea in a place called Bukulus. On seeing the Church, Mark rejoiced greatly, and kneeling down, gave glory to God. Mark stayed in Alexandria for a considerable time, and the Christians of that Church increased in number to a multitude. They grew strong in the Faith, and openly criticized the Greeks for their idolatry. The pagan city officials, knowing that Mark was in the city performing many miracles, were enraged at him in their hatred and malice, and again sought to kill him. Their efforts were long in vain, and they assembled in their pagan temples and gnashed their teeth wrathfully, saying, “O what trouble this wizard and sorcerer is causing us!”

The Evangelist Mark Travels Throughout Egypt

According to tradition, the Evangelist Mark traveled throughout Egypt, finding a receptive people as he went. In some places the people had been prepared by Christ Himself, when He was a child during the Flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). The end of the journey of Joseph, Mary, Jesus and James was Upper Egypt near the Qousqam Mountains about 100 miles from Thebes, where they lived in a cave for the better part of a year. Today this cave is the site of the Dair al-Muharraq Monastery. The first church was built on that location by about 60 AD, following the Evangelist Mark’s travels throughout Egypt. The Monastery there was built in the 4th century as were a number of other monasteries and churches that commemorated the various places Joseph, Mary, Jesus and James stayed. Many of these still exist today and the historic sites are visited by many people every year⁵⁶.

The Apostle Peter visited the Evangelist Mark in Egypt during this time, after visiting Spain and Carthage. Together they went all the way up the Nile to Thebes in Upper Egypt to the place where Jesus, Joseph, Mary and James stayed when Jesus was a toddler during the Flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). While there, Peter ordained Rufus, of the Seventy, as bishop of Thebes. Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus’ cross to Golgotha. Of the four evangelists, only Mark mentioned Rufus’ relation to Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21). Rufus also was in Rome as Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13) and must have joined Peter in Egypt or traveled with him. This dates Peter’s visit to Egypt to probably the late 50’s AD.

Alexandria as the Seat of Christian Learning

Roberts and Donaldson speak⁵⁷ of the Alexandrian Church as the leader of the Churches throughout the world. Prior to the 5th Century, the only Patriarchate that could claim “papal authority” as Rome later claimed, was Alexandria, not Rome. The spirituality and the wisdom of Alexandria can be traced to the efforts of the Evangelist Mark and the Apostle Apollos of the Seventy and their successors.

“In this volume (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6), the moral grandeur and predominance of the See of Alexandria are conspicuously illustrated. The mastery, which its great school continued to exercise over Christian thought, will all present themselves forcibly to every reflecting reader of this book. One half of this volume

⁵⁶ Holy Apostles Convent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, pp. 284-285

⁵⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, “Introductory Notice to Volume 6”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1975.

presents the Alexandrian school itself in its glorious succession of doctors and pupils⁵⁸, and the other half in the reflected light of its universal influence”.

“Because it was the capital of the empire, therefore Rome was reckoned the *first*, but not the chief, of Sees, as the Council of Nicaea declared; and because Byzantium had become ‘New Rome’, therefore it is made *second* on the list, but equal in dignity. The endowment of Alexandria was not asserted; it was unquestioned and unchallenged because as yet unholy ambition had not infected the Apostolic churches”.

“It is time to disabuse the West of its narrow ideas concerning ecclesiastical history. Dean Stanley rebuked⁵⁹ this spirit and called on us to enlarge our petty Occidental horizon. He added words of reproach which invite us to reform the entire scheme of our ecclesiastical history by presenting the Eastern Apostolic churches as the main stem of Christendom, of which the church of Rome itself was, for three hundred years, a mere colony”.

““The early Roman church was but a colony of Greek Christians or Grecized Jews. The earliest Fathers of the Western Church wrote in Greek. The early popes were not Italians, but Greeks. The name of pope is not Latin, but Greek; she is the mother, and Rome the daughter. It is her privilege to claim a direct continuity of speech with the earliest times. She read the whole code of Scripture, Old as well as New, in the language in which it was read and spoken by the Apostles”” (i.e. Greek).

““The See of Alexandria was then the “most important in the world. The Alexandrian Church was the only great seat of Christian learning. Its episcopate was the Evangelical See, as founded by the chair of St. Mark. Its occupant was the only potentate of the time who bore the name of pope. After the Council of Nicaea he became the judge of the world, from his decisions respecting the celebration of Easter; and from the obedience paid to his judgment in all matters of learning, secular and sacred’. ‘The head of the Alexandrian church,’ says⁶⁰ Gregory Nazianzen, ‘is the head of the world””.

Because of the efforts of especially Apollos and the Evangelist Mark, Alexandria had become the earliest seat of Christian learning⁶¹. Catechetical schools in Alexandria enrolled some of the brightest students from across the Empire, and with the resources of the Alexandrian library at hand, something like a Christian university came into being. And this occurred at a time when Christianity was still being persecuted.

By the beginning of the 4th Century, Alexandria was the mother of Churches and the intellectual and the ecclesiastical primacy of Christendom⁶², virtually “the light of the world”. Egypt was again the pharos of the world as it was in the days of Moses. The “men of Galilee” had taken possession of the great Alexandrian Library for their ultimate use. The Evangelist Mark and

⁵⁸ Some of these standouts of the Church in Alexandria were the Evangelist Mark and the Apostle Apollos in the 1st Century, Pantaenus and Clement in the 2nd Century, Dionysios and Gregory Thaumaturgos in the 3rd Century, and Athanasius and Cyril in the 4th Century.

⁵⁹ Dean Stanley, Lectures on the Eastern Church,

⁶⁰ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration XXI, 7.

⁶¹ Roberts and Donaldson, “Introductory Note to Clement of Alexandria”, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 2.

⁶² Roberts and Donaldson, “Introductory Note to Peter of Alexandria”, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 6.

the eloquent Apollos had founded the schools of Christendom and shaped the theology of their day.

Monasteries of the Alexandrian Church

Monasticism in and around Alexandria began in the late 40's AD, and the characteristics of the monastic life there was modeled after Church life in Jerusalem following Pentecost about 15 years earlier. We can see this from the testimony of the Jewish Philosopher Philo.

The Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BC to 50 AD) had great admiration⁶³ for the monastic communities in Egypt, whom he called "*The Therapeutae*" or healers⁶⁴. Eusebius devoted⁶⁵ a chapter of his Church History to quoting Philo's account of 1st Century monasticism⁶⁶, saying,

"The multitude of believers, both men and women, that were collected at these monasteries at the very outset, and lived lives of the most philosophical and excessive asceticism, was so great, that Philo thought it worthwhile to describe their pursuits, their meetings, their entertainment, and their whole manner of life".

Jerome stated⁶⁷ that Philo, a native of Alexandria of the priestly class, saw in the monasteries of Egypt something of credit to his nation, since there was still a distinct Jewish flavor to their life together.

Some characteristics of these monastic communities, as described by Philo in the above referenced work "On the Contemplative Life" are:

1. They consisted of men and women living in separate quarters.
2. They leave their possessions to relatives or friends when they join the community.
3. The communities are located primarily in desert areas with no city walls.
4. These communities are located in Greece and other barbarian lands, but the largest concentration is in Egypt, especially near Alexandria.
5. Their houses are very plain, just adequate to shield them from the sun and the cold.
6. They don't live close to one another as men do in cities (i.e. wall-to-wall), but yet close enough for fellowship.
7. Every house has a sacred shrine, which is called the holy place.
8. They study the Laws of God, the Prophets, hymns and Psalms, and "the writings of the ancients", which is probably the writings of the Apostles, which Philo wouldn't recognize as such. At this early date, all they could have had were the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. None of the rest of the New Testament had yet been written.
9. They pray twice every day, at sunrise and sunset.

⁶³ C. D. Yonge, tr., "On the Contemplative Life", *The Works of Philo*, Updated Edition Database, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, I:2, II:10 to IV:39.

⁶⁴ Philo applied this name to refer to the healing of the soul and the worship of God in purity and sincerity.

⁶⁵ Eusebius, *Church History*, II, 17.

Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 12.

⁶⁶ The Protestant Reformers had a strong reaction to monasticism in general, and were unwilling to believe that a well-developed monasticism could have existed at all until much later, never mind before the death of Philo in 50 AD. They concluded that these communities were either not Christian, or that the accounts were a later addition to the works of Philo. See Philip Schaff, ed., Eusebius, *Church History*, II, 17, Footnote 2, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 1.

⁶⁷ Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men", Chapter 8, *Jerome and Gennadius*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

10. During the six days of the week, each retires into solitude by himself, to work, study and compose hymns and psalms. Thus they practice the Prophets' mode of life.
11. On the 7th day, they all come together, sitting down on the floor according to age, to listen to their eldest (i.e. bishop) speak with great powers of reasoning and prudence.
12. The men and women both listen, but from separate areas of the house.
13. They only eat after sunset, leaving the daytime for work and study, and part of the night for the necessities of the body. Deacons help serve tables.
14. Some men go 3-6 days between meals, which consist of bread with a little salt⁶⁸ and perhaps hyssop. They eat no meat and don't drink wine, only water from a spring.
15. Their clothes are very plain: a cloak of some shaggy hide for winter, and a thin mantle or linen shawl for summer.
16. They sleep on the ground on a bed of straw.
17. They practice complete simplicity, looking upon falsehood as the foundation of pride, but truth as the origin of simplicity.
18. Their common assemblies are very cheerful in their praise to God.

A monastic community in Alexandria as early as the late 40's may be surprising to us in the 21st century, but it should not be if we understand those parts of the Scriptures that we tend to pass over too quickly. The Lord told the Twelve Apostles, "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). We tend to read past "wife and children" too quickly without understanding what the Lord was referring to.

All of the Twelve and the Seventy⁶⁹, after their call by the Lord, left behind both the things of this world and the pleasures of this world. Thus they gave up their land and property, and also sexual relations with their wives. Those Apostles that had wives often had their wives and even their children travel with them on their missionary journeys. The Apostle Paul, who didn't have a wife traveling with him, referred to others who did. "Do we have no right to take along a sister, a wife, as do also the other Apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (1 Corinthians 9:5) For example, the Apostle Philip traveled with his wife and three daughters for at least part of his missionary journeys⁷⁰.

If the Apostles were living a celibate life, it was natural for many others to do so also, especially during the days following Pentecost. Philo's description of daily life in the monasteries of Alexandria reads so much like the life of the Church following Pentecost that we need to reassess exactly what was going on after Pentecost. What is apparent is that everyone in the Church was doing what the Apostles were doing: they were leaving behind the things of this world, and presumably also the pleasures of this world. That everyone was leaving behind the things of this world is apparent. "All who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44-45). And again, "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands

⁶⁸ It is interesting that their diet was the same as that of the Apostle Thomas a continent away in India. See Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas, When He Came Into India", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

⁶⁹ That is, those who remained faithful to the Lord. Four of the Seventy apostatized to follow the Arch Heretic Simon Magus and therefore don't fit this model. For details of this, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St. Athanasius Press, 2004.

⁷⁰ For details, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Philip, St. Athanasius Press, 2002.

or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:34-35).

About 25 years after Pentecost, Paul hints that many people had been trying to abandon the pleasures of this world as the Apostles did. He starts out, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Corinthians 7:1), implying a general favor toward celibacy. But then he adds, "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). For those who could not live the celibate life, Paul has comforting words, "Even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you" (1 Corinthians 7:28).

The Apostles Ordain Lent

John Cassian stated⁷¹ that the Lenten Fast was ordained for the benefit of the weak brethren who were imitating Ananias and Sapphira in retaining their worldly possessions and who were almost ignorant of abstinence and contrition. This occurred in the 1st century⁷² prior to the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD; this occurred for several reasons because of changes to the early life in the Church of Jerusalem.

"As the primitive church retained its perfection unbroken, the observance of Lent did not exist. They were not bound by the requirements of this order, or confined in the very narrow limits of the fast, since the fast was embraced by everyone all year long. Gradually the multitude of believers began day by day to decline from that apostolic fervor. They began to look after their own wealth, and not to portion it out for the good of all the faithful in accordance with the arrangement of the Apostles; they developed an eye to their own private expenses. They tried not only to keep it but actually to increase it, not content with following the example of Ananias and Sapphira. Then it seemed good to all the priests that men who were hampered by worldly cares, and almost ignorant of abstinence and contrition, should be recalled to the pious duty by a fast canonically enjoined. This way they might be constrained by the necessity of paying the legal tithes; this certainly was good for the weak brethren and did not do any harm to the perfect who were living under the grace of the Gospel and by their voluntary devotion going beyond the Law. The strong brethren succeeded in attaining the blessedness that Paul speaks of: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the Law but under grace' (Romans 6:14-15). For sin cannot exercise dominion over one who lives faithfully under the liberty of grace."

⁷¹ John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Theonas, III, xxi, 30.

⁷² The Christians left Jerusalem in the late 60's AD well before the Fall of Jerusalem. First, we don't see Paul's Churches having everything in common as the Church in Jerusalem did in 30 AD. Instead, the Gentile Churches took up a collection for the Churches in Judea (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). This would have been difficult if they had sold all their property. Second there had been a persecution in Jerusalem beginning in 31 AD with the death of Archdeacon Stephen and the scattering of the Church (Acts 7:59-8:1). Part of this persecution was a confiscation of all personal belongings, leaving the Church in Jerusalem impoverished, and in dire need of help from the Gentile Churches. Third, those that wished to continue living with all things in common were forced to move to monasteries, such as the ones started by the Evangelist Mark near Alexandria in the mid 40's AD.

One might note that it was only in the Churches of Judea that everyone sold what they had and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-35). This was not happening in the Gentile Churches that Paul started. In the Gentile Churches, people held onto their own property such that they were able to donate substantially to the relief of the Church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:29; Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3).

Angelic Visitors to the Monasteries of Alexandria

One of the characteristics of the Alexandrian Church instituted by the Evangelist Mark was a strong monastic community. John Cassian, at one time a monk in Egypt, described⁷³ some details of life among the monks in Egypt during the early days of monasticism in Egypt. They were considering how many Psalms to include at Vespers, where some wanted to include over fifty Psalms⁷⁴. One evening at Vespers, an angel joined them, unrecognized, and chanted twelve Psalms; then he disappeared. From that time on, they fixed the number of Psalms at Vespers at twelve. The interesting aspect of this event is that the angel didn't stand out as being unusual! Cassian described the demeanor and holiness of the monks in Egypt as being similar to the early Church in Jerusalem after Pentecost:

“In the early days of the faith only a few, and those the best of men, were known by the name of monks, as they received that mode of life from the Evangelist Mark of blessed memory, the first to preside over the Church of Alexandria as Bishop. They preserved those grand characteristics, which we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Church and multitude of believers in primitive times was famous for. That is, ‘The multitude of believers had one heart and one soul. Nor did any of them say that any of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common’ (Acts 4:32, 2:44-45). The Egyptian monks added to these characteristics others still more sublime. Withdrawing into more secluded spots outside the cities they led a life marked by such rigorous abstinence that, even to those of another creed, the exalted character of their life was a standing marvel. For they gave themselves up to the reading of Holy Scripture and to prayers and to manual labor night and day with such fervor that they had no desire or thoughts of food — unless on the second or third day bodily hunger reminded them. They took their meat and drink not so much because they wished for it as because it was necessary for life; and even then they took it not before sunset, in order that they might connect the hours of daylight with the practice of spiritual meditations, and the care of the body with the night”.

Another example of angels attending the Liturgy in Alexandria is given from the account of the life of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria from 300 to 311 AD. During the Hierarchical Liturgies⁷⁵, Peter often sat on the footstool in front of the Bishop's Throne and not on the chair itself. Out of love and respect for their Bishop, all the people and the clergy asked him to sit on the chair, but he often didn't. Finally, one day when they were particularly insistent, he explained⁷⁶ his secret to the clergy after the Liturgy.

“Very often when I wish to draw near to that seat, I see an angel sitting on it, exceedingly radiant with the brightness of its light. Then, being in suspense

⁷³ John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, II, 5.

⁷⁴ This has to be describing very early times, since the Liturgy was well established by 60 AD.

⁷⁵ A “Hierarchical Liturgy” is one where the Bishop is present and presides, rather than a priest.

⁷⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, Ed., “The Genuine Acts of Peter”, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 6.

between joy and fear, I acknowledge that I am altogether unworthy to sit on such a seat. I would not even venture to sit on the stool itself, but I do so to avoid offending the people. Thus it is, my beloved sons, that I seem to you, in this, to transgress the pontifical rule. Nevertheless, many times when I see it vacant, as you yourselves are witnesses, I refuse not to sit upon the chair after the accustomed manner”.

Later Developments of the Monasteries of Egypt

John Cassian recounted⁷⁷ the history of the Coenobitic⁷⁸ monastics in Egypt, who were the descendants of the monks that were first organized by the Evangelist Mark. They took their direction from the Early Church described in Acts, which Cassian says was a monastic-like community. Since the leaders of the Early Church were celibate, including the Twelve and the Seventy, many people naturally imitated them, including the Apostle Paul after his conversion (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). Cassian lamented the lack of monastic zeal in later centuries, as Church leaders began to keep their own property and possessions.

“The system of the Coenobites took its rise in the days of the preaching of the Apostles. For such was all that multitude of believers in Jerusalem, which is thus described in the Acts of the Apostles. ‘But the multitude of believers was of one heart and one soul, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need’ (Acts 4:32, 2:45). And again, ‘Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need’ (Acts 4:34-35). The whole Church was then such as now exists among those few who can be found with difficulty in Coenobia. At the death of the Apostles the multitude of believers began to grow cold. Especially so was that multitude which had come to the Faith from diverse foreign nations, from whom the Apostles out of consideration for the infancy of their faith and their ingrained heathen habits, required nothing more than that they should ‘abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood’ (Acts 15:29). That liberty which was conceded to the Gentiles because of the weakness of their newly-born faith, had by degrees begun to mar the perfection of that Church which existed at Jerusalem. The fervor of that early faith cooled down owing to the daily increasing number both of natives and foreigners. Not only those who had accepted the Faith, but even those who were the leaders of the Church relaxed somewhat in their strictness. For some, fancying that what they saw permitted to the Gentiles because of their weakness, was also allowable for themselves. They thought that they would suffer no loss if they followed the faith and confession of Christ, keeping their property and possessions. But those who still maintained the fervor of the Apostles, mindful of that former perfection, left their cities and those who thought that carelessness and a laxer life was permissible to themselves and the Church of God. They began to live in rural and more sequestered spots, and there, in private and on their own account, to practice those things which they had learned

⁷⁷ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Piamun, XVIII, 5.

⁷⁸ The term “Coenobite” comes from the Greek words *koinos* and *bios*, meaning “common” and “life” respectively. They lived in communities, as opposed to those who lived as hermits, and they had all things in “common”, just like the Early Church following Pentecost.

to have been ordered by the Apostles throughout the whole body of the Church in general. That whole system, of which we have spoken, grew up from those disciples who had separated themselves from the evil that was spreading. And these, by degrees, were separated from the great mass of believers. Because they abstained from marriage and cut themselves off from their kinsmen and the life of this world, were termed monks or solitaries from the strictness of their lonely and solitary life. It followed that from their common life they were called Coenobites and their cells and lodgings Coenobia. These were the earliest kind of monks, which were first not only in time but also in grace, and which continued unbroken for a very long period up to the time of Abbot Paul and Antony⁷⁹; and even to this day we see its traces remaining in strict coenobia”

According to tradition⁸⁰, the early Irish monks modeled themselves after the monks at the hermitages of Scetis in Egypt. Early Irish monks used tones similar to that set by the Evangelist Mark in Egypt.

“As Mark went to the other cities of Egypt, he also went to interior lands in Africa, Libya, Cyrenaica and Pentapolis. Pagan temples collapsed, idols toppled and were shattered, and the people saw miracles of healing the sick, and cleansing of lepers. Many other miracles came to the truth and the people were enlightened. Even the pagans and Jews praised the virtue of the Egyptian Christians, and Egypt became a center of asceticism known throughout the Christian world. The Irish monks later modeled themselves after the monks at the hermitages of Scetis in Egypt, and it is said the ‘Scotus’ or northern Celts sang according to the tones set by the Evangelist Mark, so they must have been taught directly by some monks of Egypt. Those who seek historically accurate music for the early Celtic Rite may do research into the tones set by the early Church in Egypt or Ethiopia, because these are likely the tones sung by the Irish before other influences came into Ireland and Scotland. Other influences also came into the Middle East because of the invasion of peoples from the Far East, but some of the fragments of music of the ancient Irish Church match some portions of church music of the Egyptians and Ethiopians, who have mainly preserved their music from the ancient Church”.

Mark Travels to Jerusalem for the Funeral of the Virgin Mary

During the time that the Evangelist Mark was working in the Churches in Egypt, the Virgin Mary was growing old in Bethlehem. In c. 55 AD, as Mary reached her mid 70’s, she was feeling the effects of old age. It was then that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her that her departure was imminent⁸¹, and would occur in three days.

Shortly after Gabriel left, the Apostle John was translated from wherever he was at the time. This was similar to the way the Deacon Philip was translated from the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza to Azotus (Acts 8:26, 39-40), and as Habakkuk the prophet carried food to

⁷⁹ Paul and Antony were early Anchorite monks of the late 3rd Century, who lived as hermits in the desert. They are distinguished from Coenobite monks from their solitary mode of life.

⁸⁰ See the web site www.celticchristianity.org.

⁸¹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8. Roberts and Donaldson, “The Passing of Mary”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

Daniel, who was in the lions' den, and quickly returned to Judea⁸². There is some disagreement among the Church Fathers as to whether John was in Ephesus or in some region of Judea. They contend that John did not leave the Virgin Mary alone during her lifetime, unless it was just briefly in the care of her stepson, James, the Lord's brother.

After John arrived⁸³, "the rest of the Twelve arrived also from whatever part of the world where they were then preaching the Gospel. Peter came from Rome⁸⁴, Paul from Tiberia, Thomas from Western India, James from Jerusalem. Simon the Zealot and Jude, who had fallen asleep, were raised by the Holy Spirit out of their tombs. To them the Holy Spirit said, 'Do not think that it is now the resurrection; but on this account you have risen out of your tombs, that you may go to give greeting to the honor and wonder-working of the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because the day of her departure is at hand, of her going up into the heavens'.

Nathaniel (i.e. Bartholomew) said⁸⁵, "I was in the Thebais (possibly Thebes, in Upper Egypt) proclaiming the Word, and behold the Holy Spirit said to me, 'The mother of your Lord is taking her departure; go, then, to greet her in Bethlehem'. And, behold, a cloud of light snatched me up, and brought me to you". Matthew answered⁸⁶, "I have glorified and do glorify God, because when I was in a boat and overtaken by a storm, the sea raging with its waves, all of a sudden a cloud of light overshadowing the storm, changed it to a calm, and having snatched me up, set me down beside you". The Evangelist Mark likewise coming from Alexandria, stated⁸⁷, "And when I was finishing the canon of the third day in the city of Alexandria, just as I was praying, the Holy Spirit snatched me up, and brought me to you".

All of the Twelve arrived except Thomas. They stood and went in, and greeted the queen mother with the following words: 'Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord be with you' (Luke 1:28). And she eagerly rose quickly, and bowed herself, and kissed them, and gave thanks to God. Peter said to the Apostles, 'Let us each, according to what the Holy Spirit announced and commanded us, give full information to the mother of our Lord'. And those who had come likewise agreed to give an account of how they had come. So each of the Twelve gave Mary an account of where they were when they were summoned".

"Then the blessed Mary said to her brethren: 'What is this, that you have all come to Jerusalem?' Peter, answering, said to her: 'We need to ask this of you. Certainly, as I think, none of us knows why we have come here today with such speed. All declared plainly the place where they had been that day. And they all wondered that they were there when they heard these things. The blessed Mary said to them: 'I asked my Son, before He endured the passion, that He and you should be at my death; and He granted me this gift. Therefore you may know that my departure will be tomorrow'".

⁸² Lancelot C. L. Brenton, "Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39", *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1990

⁸³ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form", *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

⁸⁵ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

⁸⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

⁸⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

“After Mary’s death the next day, the Apostles with great honor laid the body in a tomb on the Mount of Olives, then Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olives, like the others had been brought earlier. He saw Mary’s body going up to heaven, and began to cry out to her. Then the belt with which the Apostles had encircled her body was thrown down from heaven to the blessed Thomas. And taking it, and giving thanks to God, he came again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, finding all the Apostles and a great crowd there. Then Thomas said, ‘Where have you laid her body?’ They pointed out the sepulcher with their finger; but he said, ‘The body is not there’. But they didn’t believe Thomas. Then they went to the sepulcher, which was a new one hollowed out in the rock, and took away the stone; but they did not find the body, and did not know what to say. Then Thomas told them how he was singing mass in India — he still had on his sacerdotal robes. He, not knowing the word of God, had been brought to the Mount of Olives, and saw the body of the blessed Mary going up into heaven, and prayed her to give him a blessing. She heard his prayer, and threw him her belt, which she had about her. And the Apostles seeing the belt which they had put about her, glorified God, on account of the benediction which the blessed Mary had given him, and because he had seen her body going up into heaven. Then Thomas gave them his benediction, and said, ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’”

In another account⁸⁸, it states, “And Thomas said, ‘While traversing the country of India, when the preaching was prevailing by the grace of Christ, the king’s sister’s son, Labdanus by name, was about to be sealed by me in the palace. All of a sudden the Holy Spirit said to me, ‘Thomas, go to Bethlehem to greet the mother of your Lord, because she is taking her departure to the heavens’. And a cloud of light having snatched me up, set me down beside you”.

“And the same cloud⁸⁹ by which they had been brought carried them back each to his own place. And so also the Apostles quickly returned to where they had at first been, to preach to the people of God”.

The Liturgy of St. Mark for the Church in Alexandria

A number of ancient liturgies existed in the Early Church, and the Liturgy of St. Mark served as a very important development of the Early Church. An important concept for us to understand is that all these Liturgies developed as a smooth transition from the Old Testament synagogue worship to the New Testament worship.

The perceptions of these liturgies by modern scholars depends greatly on the background of the scholar. Some, who are hostile to early liturgies and liturgy in general, claim that these liturgies were not written before the 3rd Century. Others, who are comfortable with liturgies, claim that these Early Liturgies are very representative of 1st Century practice. The early liturgies that are extant are as follows, where the first three are better known:

1. The Liturgy of St. James⁹⁰: for Jerusalem and vicinity in Hebrew or Aramaic.

⁸⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

⁸⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁹⁰ “The Liturgy of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, Publisher, p. 537.

2. The Liturgy of St. Mark⁹¹: for Egypt and North Africa in Coptic.
3. The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles⁹²: for Persia and the Far East in Greek.
4. The Clementine or Roman Liturgy: for Rome and vicinity in Latin
5. The Gallican Liturgy⁹³: for Gaul and the Western outposts in Latin.
6. The St Thomas Liturgy used in India.

Some difficulties in studying these ancient liturgies are that the oldest manuscripts date from no earlier than the 10th Century AD. None of these Liturgies appear to have been written down⁹⁴ before the 4th Century, and for obvious reasons – Christianity was illegal and the Liturgy was referred to as the “mysteries” of the Faith (1 Corinthians 4:1). The Liturgy of St. James is admittedly the oldest of these liturgies, and there are three schools of thought regarding its content. One group claims that it is entirely destitute of any claim to an apostolic origin, and that it belongs to a much later age. Another group claims that that the main structure of this liturgy is the work of St. James, while they admit that it contains some evident interpolations. A third group claims that the whole is the genuine production of the Apostle. Most scholars regard the Liturgy of St. Mark as of about the same age as the Liturgy of St. James.

Those in the second group point to the words in the texts that we have of these Liturgies, such as the words “consubstantial” and “mother of God”, that were catch-words during the controversies of the 4th Century, and say that this is evidence of later additions. But these are just a few words in a four-hour-long liturgy, where the basic form and content is Apostolic. In the words⁹⁵ of one modern scholar, of the second group, the Rev. J. Mason Neale:

“These liturgies, though not composed verbatim by the Apostles whose names they bear, were the legitimate development of their unwritten tradition respecting the Christian Sacrifice. The words, probably, in the most important parts, the general tenor in all portions, descending unchanged from the Apostolic authors”.

A. Cleveland Coxe gave⁹⁶ a good overview of the transition from the Old Testament liturgy, that was set up by Samuel and David, to the New Testament liturgies that were set up by

⁹¹ “The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark, the Disciple of the Holy Peter”, in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, Publisher, p. 551.

⁹² The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles is attributed to Thaddaeus, one of the Seventy, who was sent to Edessa in Persia by the Apostle Thomas. This is similar to the Malabar Liturgy used by the Apostle Thomas in India. See “The Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles”, in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, Publisher, p. 561.

⁹³ The Gallican Liturgy may be of later origin, but Irenaeus refers to its common practice in his days (c. 130-200 AD). See A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

⁹⁴ Although they were not written down until later, many early writers refer to their existence in a precise format and order. Some examples from the late 1st and early 2nd Century are:

Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, XX.

Justin Martyr, First Apology, 65-67.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, ii, 2-3.

⁹⁵ A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

⁹⁶ A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

the Apostles. For further information regarding various aspects of the Old Testament Liturgy, see the study⁹⁷ on the life of the Apostle Peter.

“Hippolytus, in a few sentences⁹⁸, has pointed out the epoch of David, as the dawning of Christianity itself. The pivot of Hebrew history turns on the whole system of the ‘goodly fellowship of prophets’ who heralded the Sun of Righteousness as successive constellations rise before the day. The learned Dean Payne-Smith, more minutely than Hippolytus, identifies Samuel, the master of David, as the great instrument of God in shaping the institutions of Moses to be a prelude to the Advent; in other words, transforming a local and tribal religion into that of Catholicity. The value of the Dean’s condensed and luminous elaboration can hardly be overstated”.

“But, to go behind even the Dean’s stand-point, we shall better comprehend the era of which, under God, Samuel was the author, by noting the immense importance of that specific Mosaic ordinance which not only made it possible. An all-wise *prolepsis* or anticipation governed the whole Law of Moses. We generally conceive of the Mosaic system as one of unlimited burnt offerings. On the contrary, it was a system restricting and limiting the unsystematic primeval institution of sacrifice, which had done its work by passing into the universal religions and rituals of the Gentiles. When the seminal idea of expiation, atonement, and the blood of innocence as a propitiation for guilt, was communicated to all the families of the earth, the Mosaic institutions limited sacrifices for the faithful, and localized them (i.e. to Jerusalem) with marvelous significance. Previously the faithful everywhere had imitated the sacrifices of their fathers, Noah and Abraham, who reared their altars everywhere, as Job also did, wherever they dwelt”.

“Note, further, that all this provision and *prevision* was part of the great Messianic system, which reached its crisis in the time of David, as prophetic of ‘the Son of David’. It was the office of Samuel to take the Mosaic ordinances, and to shape them for the advent of the Lamb of God, for His sacrifice upon Calvary, and for the setting-up of His universal kingdom. The Institutions of Samuel, therefore, were *in essence* institutions for the Gospel-day, and they were completed by the anointing of David as king, and by his prophetic mission to provide the Psalter. Then the Ark came out of curtains, and the Lord chose and appointed *the place* of which Moses had spoken, none other than the spot where Abraham had rehearsed in type the Sacrifice and Resurrection of Christ. According as it was written: ‘And Abraham called the name of the place *Jehovah-Jireh* (The-Lord-Will-Provide); as it is said *to this day*, “In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided”’ (Genesis 22:14). Thus, all sacrifice acceptable to God was shown to have reference to the Paschal Lamb, who on that mount of the Lord should be sacrificed, and rise again, as was accomplished in a figure earlier.

“The Temple itself was supplied with an expository liturgy. Moreover, a liturgical system, revolving about the central worship of the Temple, was brought to every man’s door by the establishment of the synagogue for the villages of Israel. The synagogue-worship became, therefore, the education and preparation of the faithful for the simple and spiritual worship of the new Law. This our Lord Himself

⁹⁷ Mark Kern, The Apostle Peter, St Athanasius Press, 2005, p. 258. See <https://www.stathanasius.org/resources/e-books>.

⁹⁸ Hippolytus, “On the Psalms”, Part I Exegetical Works, Extant Works and Fragments, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5.

expounded to the outcast Samaritans: ‘The hour is coming, when you will neither on this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:21-23). We have seen that the hour promised by Malachi was supposed by the Ante-Nicene Fathers to be here intended: ‘My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to My Name, and a pure offering’” (Malachi 1:11).

“The primitive writers were universally impressed with these principles, and they are essential to the study of the liturgies”.

Specific developments in the Old Testament Liturgy, as outlined⁹⁹ by Coxe, included the following:

1. Samuel instituted “Schools of the Prophets,” out of which grew the synagogue system supplying the Rabbinical education to Israel, and furnished chiefs to the synagogues. See Acts 3:24; and compare 1 Samuel 10:5, 19:20, and 1 Chronicles 9:22.
2. Choral worship and the chanting of hymns — e.g., of Moses and Miriam, and Hannah (Samuel’s mother) — was in full operation under Samuel.
3. David, inspired as “the sweet singer of Israel,” supplied the Psalter, which in diverse arrangements has continued among Christians to be the marrow of public worship “in every place,” and throughout the world.
4. The reading of the Law and the Prophets was now set in order; and not only was the Temple supplied with teachers, but also the villages in every tribe.
5. Thus the Christian Church was provided with a system of worship from the hour of its institution, the synaxis succeeding the synagogue. The “ministration of the word” was enriched by Gospels and Epistles, by psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and by “the prayers”, based upon the *Shemone esre*¹⁰⁰, which now began to be composed and multiplied in the churches. Touching “spontaneous prayer” as exemplified in the first ages, Cyprian encouraged¹⁰¹ spontaneous prayer to pray for the lapsed.

All the Early Liturgies had a similar format, and were divided into two parts: the first part for everyone, including Gentiles, penitents, catechumens, and the faithful, and the second part for only the faithful. Coxe gave¹⁰² a brief summary of this first part as follows:

“After the Psalms and Lessons with which the service commenced, a section from the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles was read; after which the deacon or presbyter read the Gospel. Then followed an exhortation from one or more of the presbyters; and the bishop or president (similar to the synagogue ruler) delivered a Homily or Sermon, explanatory of the Scripture which had been read, and exhorting the people to imitate the virtues exemplified. When the preacher had concluded his discourse with a doxology in praise of the Holy Trinity, a deacon made proclamation for all non-communicants to withdraw. Then came the dismissal of

⁹⁹ A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

¹⁰⁰ The *Shemone esre* was part of the Jewish liturgies, and the petitions of the Lord’s prayer were extracted almost verbatim from the Jewish liturgies. See Cyprian, Treatises, “Elucidations”, III, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5.

¹⁰¹ Cyprian, Epistles, XXX, 6.

¹⁰² A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

the several classes of catechumens and penitents, after the prayers for each respectively, and the second part commenced”.

“The second part consisted of two halves, essentially distinct: prayers for the faithful, for mankind in general and the introductory to the Oblation; then the Anaphora or Oblation itself. The introductory part varied considerably in the formularies of different churches; but in the Anaphora all the existing liturgies so closely agree, in substance at least, if not in words, that they can always be the same¹⁰³. The following essential points belong, without exception, to them all”:

1. The Kiss of Peace;
2. The form beginning, *Lift up your hearts*;
3. The Hymn, *Therefore with angels*, etc.;
4. Commemoration of the words of Institution;
5. The Oblation;
6. Prayer of Consecration;
7. Prayers for the Church on Earth;
8. Prayers for the dead;
9. The Lord’s Prayer;
10. Breaking of the Bread;
11. Communion.

The Martyrdom of the Evangelist Mark

According to Eusebius¹⁰⁴ and Jerome¹⁰⁵, the Evangelist Mark was martyred in the 8th year of Nero, or 62 AD, and was succeeded as Bishop of Alexandria by Annianus. According to tradition¹⁰⁶, this occurred at Bucolia, which is near Alexandria.

In Alexandria, he succeeded in establishing the Church of God, in giving her bishops, priests and deacons and in rooting everything firmly in faithfulness and devotion. Mark confirmed his preaching with many great miracles. When the pagans brought accusations against Mark, as a destroyer of their idolatrous faith, and when the governor of the city began to search for Mark, he fled again to Pentapolis, where he continued his earlier work. After two years, Mark again returned to Alexandria to the great joy of all his faithful, whose number had already increased greatly. The pagans took the opportunity to seize Mark, and they bound him tightly and began to drag him over the cobblestone pavement crying: "We're taking the ox to the stall."

Wounded and bloodied throughout, they cast Mark into prison where, at first, a heavenly angel appeared to him encouraging and strengthening him. After that, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him and said: "Peace be to you Mark, my Evangelist!" To that Mark replied: "Peace be to you also my Lord Jesus Christ!" The next day the vicious men brought Mark out of prison and again dragged him throughout the streets with the same cry: "Let us drag the ox to the pen."

¹⁰³ A major change to this part of the liturgy occurred in the West in the 14th Century. Instead of the Eucharist being “Holy things for the Holy”, i.e. holy things for holy people, it became an elevation of the host to God, where the people just watched instead of partaking.

¹⁰⁴ Eusebius, Church History, II, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men”, Chapter 1, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

¹⁰⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, Ed., “The Genuine Acts of Peter of Alexandria”, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6.

Completely exhausted and worn out, Mark uttered: "Into Your hands O Lord, I give up my spirit." Mark expired and his soul was translated into a better world. His holy relics were honorably buried by Christians and, through the centuries, his relics give healing to people from all of their afflictions, pains and diseases.

Additional details surrounding the martyrdom of the Evangelist Mark were recorded¹⁰⁷ by Symeon Metaphrastes, a Church Historian of the 9th Century. In the year of Mark's martyrdom, the Feast of Pascha (Easter in the West) coincided with the festival of the idol Serapis, or April 24th. As the Evangelist Mark was celebrating the Divine Liturgy that day, the pagans assembled a great mob for their own festival. They suddenly attacked the Church and arrested Mark. Tying him up with thongs, they dragged him through the streets and lanes saying, "Let us lead this bullock to the trough". Mark, however, bore these torments calmly, and gave thanks to the Lord saying, "I thank You, O Lord Jesus Christ, that You have counted me worthy to endure these sufferings for Your Name".

As they dragged him along the ground littered with sharp stones, his body was torn by the rocks and covered with wounds, such that blood stained the path that they took. Finally they brought the severely lacerated Mark to prison and cast him in at the onset of evening, as they gathered to take counsel as to what sort of death they would subject him to. At midnight, an angel appeared to Mark and strengthened him for the struggle ahead. Also the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed to him, comforting him with His appearance.

The following morning, the savage mob of pagans dragged the Apostle from his dungeon cell and again dragged him through the streets of the city. Mark could not sustain any more wounds, and soon expired, giving thanks to God and saying, "Into Your hands, O Lord, do I surrender my spirit".

The wickedness of the pagans was not satisfied with the death of the Apostle, so they decided to consume his body with fire. After they built a large fire, suddenly darkness descended, along with a dreadful clap of thunder. The earth quaked, and rain and hail fell, scattering the crowd and extinguishing the fire. The pious Christians took the body of Mark with reverence, and laid it in a tomb of stone in the place where they held their prayer services.

In the year 310 AD, a Church was erected over the tomb of the Evangelist Mark, and his relics remained in Alexandria until the 9th Century. In 828 AD, when the dominion of Islam and the Monophysite heresy had greatly weakened the Orthodox Church in Egypt, the relics of the Evangelist Mark were transferred to Venice, near where he had preached the Gospel in Aquilea. Today there is a magnificent Church dedicated to him, where there is preserved an ancient manuscript of his Gospel on Egyptian papyrus that was written, according to tradition, by his own hand.

According to tradition¹⁰⁸, the Evangelist Mark had already ordained Annianus as Bishop before his departure, but perhaps not as Patriarch of Alexandria. The successor to Annianus as Patriarch was Avilius, who was ordained by the Evangelist Luke after the death of the Apostle Paul.

¹⁰⁷ Symeon Metaphrastes, as quoted in Holy Apostles Convent, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Buean Vista CO, 1990, pp. 255-256.

¹⁰⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, Apostolic Constitutions VII, iv, 46, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

The Extent of the Influence of the Church of Alexandria

According to tradition, as described¹⁰⁹ in “The Teaching of the Apostles” from Persia, the Bishops in the Church were first called “Rulers” and “Guides”. This short work describes the area directed by some of the Twelve and the Seventy. It doesn’t cover where all of the Apostles went, but it does mention the area covered by the Evangelist Mark as including not just Egypt, but also the Sinai Peninsula and points East to Persia.

“And after the death of the Apostles there were Guides and Rulers in the Churches; and, whatever the Apostles had committed to them, they continued to teach to the multitude through their entire lives. At their deaths they committed to their disciples whatever they had received from the Apostles; that is, what James had written from Jerusalem, and Simon from the city of Rome, and John from Ephesus, and Mark from Alexandria the Great, and Andrew from Phrygia, and Luke from Macedonia, and Thomas from India. The epistles of an Apostle were received and read in the Churches that were in every place, just as the achievements of their Acts, which Luke wrote, are read. In this way, the Apostles were known, and the prophets, and the Old Testament and the New. One truth was proclaimed in them all: that one Spirit spoke in them all, from one God whom they had all worshipped and had all preached. And the diverse countries received their teaching. Everything, therefore, which had been spoken by our Lord by means of the Apostles, and which the Apostles had delivered to their disciples, was believed and received in every country, by the operation of our Lord, who said to them: ‘I am with you, even until the world shall end’. The Guides disputed with the Jews from the books of the prophets, and contending also against the deluded pagans with the terrible mighty-works, which they did in the Name of Christ. All the peoples, even those that dwell in other countries, quietly and silently received the Gospel of Christ. Those who became confessors cried out under their persecution: ‘This our persecution today shall plead on our behalf, lest we be punished, for having been formerly persecutors ourselves’. For there were some of them against whom death by the sword was ordered. There were others of them from whom they took away whatever they possessed, and let them go. The more affliction that arose against them, the richer and larger did their congregations become; and with gladness in their hearts did they receive death of every kind. And by ordination to the priesthood, which the Apostles themselves had received from our Lord, did their Gospel wing its way rapidly into the four quarters of the world.

Alexandria the Great, and Thebais, and the whole of Inner Egypt, and all the country of Pelusium (i.e. the Sinai Peninsula), and extending as far as the borders of the Indians, received the Apostles’ ordination to the priesthood from Mark the Evangelist, who was ruler and guide there in the church which he had built, in which he also ministered.

Luke the Evangelist had such diligence that he wrote the exploits of the Acts of the Apostles, and the ordinances and laws of the ministry of their priesthood, and where each one of them went. By his diligence did Luke write these things, and more than these; and he placed them in the hand of Priscilla and Aquila, his

¹⁰⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Teaching of the Apostles”, Memoirs of Edessa and Other Ancient Syriac Documents, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

disciples. They accompanied him up to the day of his death, just as Timothy and Erastus of Lystra, and Manaen, the first disciples of the Apostles, accompanied Paul until he was taken up to the city of Rome because he had withstood Tertullus the orator (Acts 24:1-9).

There was also a very strong monastic community that developed in the Sinai Peninsula, part of the Evangelist Mark's territory, that consisted of over 60 monasteries, some of which are still active. One of these, St. Catherine's Monastery¹¹⁰, which grew from a chapel erected by Helena (the Mother of Emperor Constantine) in the 4th century, is located at the foot of Mt. Sinai at the spot traditionally associated with the burning bush. At the peak of Mt. Sinai overlooking the cliff is a small chapel that was rebuilt from a sixth century church built by Justinian. Nearby the chapel is a cave that may be the "cleft of the rock" where God placed Moses. Other caves exist on Mt. Sinai, also. Many of these monasteries were destroyed during the Moslem conquest of the 6th and 7th centuries, but some survived intact; others have been rebuilt and others are currently being excavated. The 20th Century witnessed a veritable revolution in the study of these Judean desert monasteries, and an entire issue of an archaeology journal¹¹¹ was devoted to this remarkable concentration of monasteries, some built right into the side of a rock cliff. Current excavations indicate that these desert monasteries started in the 3rd Century, but much more work needs to be done in the excavations.

Gospel: Mark 6:7-13

Jesus called the twelve to *Himself*, and began to send them out two *by* two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bag, no bread, no copper in *their* money belts -- but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. Also He said to them, 'In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!' So they went out and preached that *people* should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:7-13).

This Gospel Reading concerns the sending out of the Twelve Apostles two-by-two, where the Evangelist Mark was not one of the Twelve. There are some differences in Mark's account that do not appear in other accounts. Mark's account doesn't say anything about the Gentiles; Matthew says to avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans (Matthew 10:5); Mark doesn't say anything about raising the dead; Matthew does (Matthew 10:8). Mark says to take sandals; Matthew says not to (Matthew 10:10). On the other hand, Mark is the only one who mentions the use of holy oil in healing.

The Evangelist Mark was numbered among the Seventy Apostles, along with the Evangelist Luke, whom the Lord sent out two-by-two a little later (Luke 10:1-20). He did not tell them to avoid the Gentiles and Samaritans, but He implied that they may be eating non-Kosher food (Luke 10:8). The Seventy were not instructed to raise the dead, but they did take sandals.

¹¹⁰ Biblical Archaeology Review, July/August 1985, pp 27-41.

¹¹¹ Biblical Archaeology Review, September/October 1995.

We are not told if the Evangelist Mark volunteered to accompany some of the Twelve, but some early writers¹¹² mistakenly numbered him among the Twelve.

In all the accounts of the missions of the Twelve and the Seventy, many miracles are recorded. How are we to receive this?

Performing Miracles Does not Guarantee Salvation

What is the purpose of the miraculous gifts that seem to be so prevalent in the Scriptures? Why do we seem to see them less prevalent today? There can be fake miracles organized by the demons to lead us away from God. If we had the opportunity to perform miracles how receptive would we be to performing them the way God intended? Let us hear what the Church Fathers have had to say about the problems in performing miracles in their day.

Cyprian of Carthage noted¹¹³ that doing the will of our Father is more important than the working of wonders. People may work wonders but not be saved.

“To prophesy, cast out demons, and do great acts upon the earth is certainly a sublime and an admirable thing; but one does not attain the kingdom of heaven although he is found in all these things, unless he walks in the observance of the right and just way. The Lord denounces, ‘Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23). There is need of righteousness, that one may deserve well of God the Judge; we must obey His precepts and warnings, that our merits may receive their reward.”

Early Christian tradition¹¹⁴ put Apostolic gifts in perspective. Spiritual gifts for performing wonders are not for the benefit of the individual, but for the conviction of unbelievers. We do not rejoice over them, but only rejoice at our salvation. Not all unbelievers will be affected by the wonders; neither the Egyptians in Moses’ day nor the Jewish leaders in Christ’s day were any better off for having seen many wonders. We may be living in an age that scoffs at miracles, just like Moses’ day and Christ’s day.

“The gifts of the Spirit were first given to the Apostles when they were about to preach the Gospel to every creature; afterwards they were given to those who had believed. The gifts were given not for the advantage of those who perform them, but for the conviction of the unbelievers, that those whom the word did not persuade, the power of signs might put to shame. Signs are not for us who believe, but for the unbelievers, both for the Jews and Gentiles. There is no profit to us to cast out demons; the advantage is to those who are cleansed by the power of the Lord. The Lord Himself instructs us saying, ‘Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven’ (Luke 10:20). It is not necessary that every one of the faithful should cast out demons, raise the dead, or speak with tongues. Unbelievers are often put to shame,

¹¹² Paul Hetherington, The ‘Painter’s Manual’ of Dionysius of Fourna, Oakwood Publications, London, 1981, p. 52.

¹¹³ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, I, 15.

¹¹⁴ Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VIII, I, 1.

not with the demonstration of the world, but by the power of the signs. Not all the ungodly are affected by wonders. God Himself is a witness, when He says in the Law, ‘In the law it is written: "With *men of* other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me", says the Lord’ (Isaiah 28:11, 1 Corinthians 14:21). The Egyptians did not believe in God when Moses had done so many signs and wonders (Exodus 7-11); nor did the multitude of the Jews believe in Christ when He healed every sickness and disease among them (Matthew 9:35). The Egyptians were not shamed by the rod which was turned into a living serpent (Exodus 7:9-13); by the hand which was made white with leprosy (Exodus 4:6); by the river Nile turned into blood (Exodus 7:17-22). The Jews were not shamed by the blind who recovered their sight (Matthew 9:27-34), by the lame that walked (Matthew 11:5), or by the dead who were raised (John 12:9-10). ‘Moses was resisted by Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8); Christ by Annas and Caiaphas (John 18:13-14). Thus signs do not shame all into belief, but only those of a good disposition.”

Ambrose of Milan noted¹¹⁵ that Jesus had said that His disciples would do greater miracles than He had done. The Lord prefers His disciples to perform these great works, rather than doing them Himself. Even though His disciples do these things, there is no power of man involved.

“It is the will of the Lord that His disciples should possess great powers; it is His will that the same things which He did when on earth should be done in His Name by His servants. He said, ‘He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do’ (John 14:12). He gave them power to raise the dead. Whereas He could have restored to Saul the use of his sight by Himself, He nevertheless sent him to His disciple Ananias that by his blessing Saul’s eyes might be restored. Peter also He bade walk with Himself on the sea, and because he faltered He blamed him for lessening the grace given him by the weakness of his faith. He Who Himself was the light of the world granted to His disciples to be the light of the world through grace. Because He purposed to descend from heaven and to ascend there again, He took up Elijah into heaven to restore him again to earth at the time which should please Him. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, He foreshadowed the Sacrament of Baptism at the hands of John.”

“He gave all gifts to His disciples, of whom He said, ‘In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover’ (Mark 16:17-18). So then, He gave them all things; but there is no power of man exercised in these things, in which the grace of the divine gift operates.”

John Cassian recorded¹¹⁶ the teachings of Abbot Nesteros (of the Desert Fathers) on the subject of three different methods of the workings of Spiritual Gifts. The first method is performed by certain righteous men on account of their holiness. The second can proceed even from sinners where healing can occur due to the faith of the sick person. The third method comes from the

¹¹⁵ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Repentance, I, viii, 34-35.

¹¹⁶ John Cassian, Second Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xv, 1.

deceitfulness of demons, who pretend to flee from a man enslaved to sin so that people will admire him and copy him in his sin.

“The first is for the sake of healing, when the grace of signs accompanies certain elect and righteous men on account of the merits of their holiness. The Apostles and many of the saints did signs and wonders in accordance with the authority of the Lord Who says, ‘Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give’” (Matthew 10:8).

“The second is used for the edification of the church or on account of the faith of those who bring their sick, or of those who are to be cured, where the virtue of health proceeds even from sinners and men unworthy of it. Jesus said, ‘Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:22-23). On the other hand, if the faith of those who bring them or of the sick is lacking, it prevents those on whom the gifts of healing are conferred from exercising their powers of healing. Luke said, ‘Jesus could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief’ (Mark 6:5-6). The Lord Himself said, ‘Many were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian’” (Luke 4:27).

“The third method of healing is copied by the deceit of demons, that, when a man who is enslaved to obvious sins is regarded as a saint and a servant of God out of admiration for his miracles, men may be persuaded to copy his sins. Thus an opening being made for finding fault and the sanctity of the Faith may be brought into disgrace. Or else he who believes that he possesses the gift of healing may be puffed up by pride of heart and so fall more grievously. When people invoke the names of those, who the demons know have no merits of holiness or any spiritual fruits, they pretend that they are disturbed and made to flee from the bodies they have possessed. Of which Moses said, ‘If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ -- which you have not known -- ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul’ (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Of these Jesus said, ‘false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’” (Matthew 24:24).

John Chrysostom compared¹¹⁷ Judas Iscariot with Paul; both had similar opportunities and both were given similar grace. Paul pursued his gift, but Judas was overcome by his covetousness.

“Paul struggled with hunger, was at a loss to obtain necessary food, and daily underwent great sufferings, pursuing with great zeal the road which leads to heaven. Judas was called before Paul, enjoyed the same advantages as Paul did, was initiated in the highest form of Christian life, partook of the holy table and that most awesome of sacred feasts, received such grace as to be able to raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons, often heard discourses concerning poverty,

¹¹⁷ John Chrysostom, A Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself, 11.

and spent so long a time in the company of Christ Himself. He was entrusted with the money of the poor, so that his passion might be soothed, for he was a thief (John 12:6); even then did not become any better, although he had been favored with such great condescension. Christ knew that he was covetous and destined to perish on account of his love of money; yet he not only did not demand punishment of him for this at that time. He tried to soften his passion by entrusting him with the money of the poor, that having some means of appeasing his greed he might be saved from falling into that appalling gulf of sin, checking the greater evil by a lesser one.”

Chrysostom also stated¹¹⁸ that many people in the early Church received Apostolic gifts, some more than others, as a sign to unbelievers that the Holy Spirit was speaking. This caused some division when those with the greater gifts became prideful of their gifts. This is one of the reasons that God caused extensive working of miracles to cease¹¹⁹.

“Whoever was baptized immediately spoke with tongues and not with tongues only, but many also prophesied, and some performed many other wonderful works. On coming over from idols, without any clear knowledge or training in the Scriptures, they received the Spirit at their baptism. Yet they didn’t see the Spirit, for It is invisible; therefore God’s grace bestowed some tangible proof of that energy. One immediately spoke in Persian, another in Latin, another in Indian, another in some other such language; this made clear to those that were outside the Church that it is the Spirit in the person speaking. Therefore Paul says, ‘The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*’ (1 Corinthians 12:7), calling the gifts ‘a manifestation of the Spirit’. The Apostles themselves received this sign first, and the faithful went on receiving it; many used to raise the dead, to cast out demons and to perform many other such wonders; some had more gifts, some less. More abundant than all was the gift of tongues among them; and this became a cause of division to them, not from its own nature but from the perverseness of those that had received it. The possessors of the greater gifts were lifted up against those that had the lesser; those with the lesser gifts were grieved, and envied the owners of the greater.”

Chrysostom further noted¹²⁰ that there were different ways that miracles were worked. Before the Crucifixion, the Apostles did this by power given to them by the Lord. Afterward, they did this by the Holy Spirit, and they also conferred the Holy Spirit to others. The Prophets also did their miracles by the Holy Spirit, but they were not able to confer the Holy Spirit to others.

“At first the Apostles didn’t cast out demons by the Spirit, but by power received from Jesus; as He said, ‘If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out?’ (Matthew 12:27). He said this signifying that before the Crucifixion not everyone cast out demons by the Spirit, but that some did so by the power received from Him. On the other hand, when Jesus was about to send them out as Apostles after the Crucifixion He said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22); Luke said, ‘The Holy Spirit came upon them’ (Acts 19:6), and then they worked miracles. When He first sent them out, the Scripture doesn’t say that He gave them the Holy Spirit, but that ‘He gave them power’ (Matthew 10:1), saying, ‘Cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received,

¹¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXIX, 1.

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 11.

¹²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LI, 2.

freely give' (Matthew 10:8). How did the Prophets prophesy and work wonders? In the case of the Prophets, everyone agrees that the Gift was that of the Holy Spirit. This Grace departed when Christ said, 'Your house is left to you desolate' (Matthew 23:38); even before that day its dearth had begun, for there was no longer any prophet among the Jews, nor did Grace visit their holy things. The Holy Spirit had been withheld, but was in the future to be shed abundantly. The beginning of this imparting was after the Crucifixion, not only as to its abundance, but also as to the increased greatness of the gifts. The Gift was more marvelous, as when It said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of' (Luke 9:55); and again, 'You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption' (Romans 8:15). The men of old possessed the Spirit themselves, but did not impart It to others; the Apostles filled tens of thousands with It. The Lord spoke of this grace, 'The Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified'" (John 7:39).

Chrysostom also pointed out¹²¹ that the Scriptures record prophecy and miracles sometimes coming from the enemies of God.

"How does Paul call those 'carnal', who had attained so large a measure of the Spirit? Because they were carnal, to whom the Lord said, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness' (Matthew 7:23). Yet they cast out demons, raised the dead, and uttered prophecies; it is possible even for one who performed miracles to be carnal. God prophesied by Balaam; to Pharaoh and to Nebuchadnezzar He revealed things to come; Caiaphas prophesied, not knowing what he said; yea, and some others cast out demons in His name, though they were 'not with Him' (Luke 9:49), since not for the doers' sake are these things done, but for others' sake. Sometimes those who are positively unworthy are made instrumental to the work of God. If in the case of unworthy men these things are done for others' sake, why wonder when they are done by saints?"

Chrysostom concluded¹²² that while working miracles can cause us problems, the greatest miracles are those associated with our own good deeds; these are the greatest signs.

"Miracles often distinguish a person, but they have also injured him who had the power, by lifting him up to pride and vainglory. But in our works there is no place for any such suspicion; they profit both the ones who do them and many others."

"Let us perform these with much diligence. For if you change from inhumanity to almsgiving, you have healed a withered hand. If you withdraw from theaters and go to Church, you have cured the lame foot. If you avoid looking at a harlot, and from beauty not your own, you have opened the eyes that were blind. If instead of satanic songs, you learn spiritual psalms, you have caused the dumb to speak."

"These are the greatest miracles; these are the wonderful signs. If we go on working these signs, we shall be a great and admirable sort of persons through these; we shall win over all the wicked unto virtue; and we shall enjoy the life to come."

¹²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, VIII, 2.

¹²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 11.

Taking Nothing for the Journey

Jesus called the twelve to *Himself*, and began to send them out two *by* two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bag, no bread, no copper in *their* money belts -- but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics” (Mark 6:7-9).

This is quite a contrast to any kind of travel today, from taking a vacation to modern missionary travel. Common practice is to take along everything one will need for the journey, since one cannot necessarily count on the things we need being available at our destination. Yet the Twelve and the Seventy, along with Paul, did things much differently.

John Chrysostom pointed out¹²³ that the Apostles were sent out as workmen, and that the people they met had an obligation to provide for their needs. The Apostles didn’t need to beg; the people they met owed them the provisions that they needed.

“In case the Apostles should say, ‘where are we to obtain our necessary food?’ Jesus didn’t say to them, ‘You have heard that I have told you before, “Behold the fowls of the air”’, for they were not yet able to realize this commandment in their actions. He added what came far short of this, ‘The workman is worthy of his food’ (Matthew 10:10, Luke 10:7), declaring that they must be nourished by their disciples. Thus they can’t be high minded towards those whom they were teaching, as though they were giving everything and receiving nothing at their hands; this also insures that their disciples won’t break away, as being despised by their teachers.”

“After this, that they may not say, ‘Do you then command us to live by begging?’ and be ashamed of this, Jesus signifies the thing to be a debt, calling them ‘workmen’, and by terming what was given, ‘hire’. He said, Don’t think because the labor is in words, that the benefit conferred by you is small. The thing has much labor; and whatever they that are taught may give, it is not a free gift that they bestow, but a recompense which they render; ‘for the workman is worthy of his food’. Jesus said this, not as declaring the worth of the apostles’ labors to be just the food that they eat, far from it; God forbid. Instead He made it a law for them to seek nothing more, and as convincing the givers, that what they do is not an act of liberality, but a debt.”

Ascetics Still Follow this Command

In monastic communities all over the world, monks still practice what Jesus taught. This lifestyle is not for everyone, but it is important for everyone to recognize what the monks are striving to achieve.

Basil the Great wrote¹²⁴ of a conversation he had with a Bishop he met, who was serving one of the hospitals near Caesarea. The godly Bishop advocated poverty and said that everyone should limit his possessions to one garment as John the Baptist suggested (Luke 3:10-11). Further

¹²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 7.

¹²⁴ Basil the Great, Letter to Amphilochius, CL, 3-4.

he suggested that we try to be perfect, sell what we have and give to the poor. No one should distribute his own wealth however, but should entrust it to whoever manages the affairs of the poor, similar to the way the Apostles did it. He said that experience was needed in order to distinguish between cases of genuine need and of mere greedy begging. Whoever gives to the afflicted gives to the Lord, and from the Lord shall have his reward; but he who gives to every vagabond casts to a dog, a nuisance indeed from his persistent appealing, but deserving no pity on the ground of want.

John Chrysostom pointed out¹²⁵ differences between the Old Testament and the New. The great saints of the New Testament along with the Apostles are living like Elijah and Elisha. There is no longer a contempt for poverty and a blessing for wealth.

“One says, ‘the wisdom of the poor man is despised’ (Ecclesiastes 9:16). Another says, ‘Give me neither riches nor poverty’ (Proverbs 30:8), and another, ‘Deliver me from the furnace of poverty’ (Isaiah 48:10 OSB). Yet if riches and poverty are from the Lord, how can either poverty or riches be an evil? Why then were these things said? They were said under the Old Covenant, where there was much account made of wealth, where there was great contempt of poverty, where the one was a curse and the other a blessing. But now it is no longer so. But will you listen to the praises of poverty? Christ sought after it, and said, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head’ (Matthew 8:20). Again He said to His disciples, ‘Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for *your* journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food’ (Matthew 10:9-10). Paul said, ‘As having nothing and yet possessing all things’ (2 Corinthians 6:10). Peter said to the man lame from birth, ‘Silver and gold I do not have’ (Acts 3:6). Under the Old Covenant, where wealth was held in admiration, who were the admired? Was not Elijah, who had nothing except the sheepskin? Was not Elisha? Was not John the Baptist?”

“Let no man then be humiliated on account of his poverty: It is not poverty which humiliates, but wealth, which compels us to have need of many, and forces us to be under obligations to many?”

Staying with the People They Meet

Jesus also told the Twelve (Mark 6:10-11) and the Seventy (Luke 10:5-7), “In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them”.

There Are Those Who Hoard Material Things

On the opposite side from those who choose a life of poverty are those who hoard material things. One of the big dangers of a lifestyle like this is covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

¹²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XVIII, 4.

John Chrysostom focused¹²⁶ on the case of Judas: he performed miracles himself and had daily instruction by Jesus. Yet covetousness caused him to live unnaturally instead of rejecting gold, silver and two coats. Jesus could do nothing for him because Jesus' call is not compulsory.

“Listen, all you covetous, you that have the disease of Judas; listen, and beware of the calamity. He that was with Christ, performed miracles, and had the benefit of so much instruction, yet was sunk into such a gulf, because he was not freed from the disease. How much more shall we, who do not so much as listen to the Scripture, who are constantly riveted to present things, become an easy prey to this calamity, unless we have the advantage of constant care. 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. Yet he was not taught self-restraint; how do we expect to escape the disease, if we don't have the benefit of close personal attention, and do not use much diligence? Terrible is this monster; yet nevertheless, if we are willing, we will easily get the better of him. Covetousness is not natural; and this is clear from those that are free from it. Natural things are common to everyone; but this desire has its origin from negligence alone. From this it takes its birth and derives its increase; and when it has seized on 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, in a word all men, and with these even themselves, this is to live against nature. How did he become such a one, 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. It admonishes, advises, and manages all things, so as to persuade men to become good; but it does not compel. If we want to learn why Judas became such as he was, we will find him to have been ruined by covetousness.”

Tertullian pointed out¹²⁷ a connection between grief over lost items and an unwillingness to give. Both are a sin against God. We need to concentrate on heavenly things and not on earthly things like the Gentiles. Those who don't fear to lose something don't find it irksome to give alms.

“The love of money – that is, Covetousness -- is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6:10). Let us not interpret that covetousness as consisting merely in the lusting after what is another's; for even what seems ours is another's. Nothing is ours, since all things are God's, whose are we also ourselves. When suffering from a loss, if we grieve for what is lost from what is not our own, we are bordering on covetousness. We seek what is another's when we don't like to lose what is another's. He, who is greatly stirred with impatience at a loss, by giving things earthly the precedence over things heavenly, sins directly against God. We greatly shock the Holy Spirit for the sake of a worldly matter. Willingly, therefore, let us lose earthly things and let us keep heavenly things. Let the whole world perish, so I may make patience my gain! Would someone who has not made up his mind to patiently endure the loss of somewhat of his, either by theft, by force, or by carelessness, readily donate his own property in the cause of almsgiving? Patience in losses is an exercise in giving. He who doesn't fear to lose, doesn't find it irksome to give. Otherwise how will one, when he has two coats, give one to the naked (Luke 3:11), unless he is a man likewise to offer his cloak to one who takes

¹²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXX, 4.

¹²⁷ Tertullian, Of Patience, III, vi, 7.

away his coat as well? (Matthew 5:40) How shall we fashion to us friends from mammon (Luke 16:9), if we love it so much as not to put up with its loss? (Matthew 10:39) We shall perish together with the lost mammon. To exhibit impatience at all losses is the Gentiles' business, who give money the precedence perhaps over their soul. In their lust for lucre, there is nothing which damnation would fear which they hesitate to do. But we are distinguished from them in that we don't lay down our soul for money, but money for our soul, whether spontaneously in giving or patiently in losing.

Desiring to be Perfect

Jesus encouraged us to choose a life of poverty – that is avoiding a concentration on material things.

Jerome pointed out¹²⁸ that the life we live is our own choice. We are given the opportunity to give away all our property and live as monks in a state of worldly weakness, but we don't have to. The monks do this in an effort to be perfect as the Lord encouraged us to do.

“Our Faith does not train boxers, athletes, sailors, soldiers, or ditch-diggers; followers of wisdom, who devote themselves to the worship of God, know why they were created and are in the world, from which they are impatient to depart. Paul says, ‘When I am weak, then am I strong’ (2 Corinthians 12:10). ‘Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day’ (2 Corinthians 4:16). And ‘I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is far better*’ (Philippians 1:23). And ‘Make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts’ (Romans 13:14). Are all commanded to avoid two coats, food in their scrip, money in their purse, a staff in the hand, and shoes on the feet? (Matthew 10:9) Or to sell all they possess and give to the poor, and follow Jesus? (Matthew 19:21) Of course not; this command is for those who wish to be perfect. On the contrary John the Baptist lays down one rule for the soldiers, another for the publicans (Luke 3:10-14). But the Lord said to him who had boasted of having kept the whole Law, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’ (Matthew 19:21). Jesus did not want to lay a heavy burden on unwilling shoulders; so He sent His hearer away with full power to please himself, ‘If you want to be perfect’. If you wish to be perfect, it is good not to drink wine, and eat meat. If you wish to be perfect, it is better to enrich the mind than to stuff the body. But if you are an infant and fond of the cooks and their preparations, no one will snatch the dainties out of your mouth.”

¹²⁸ Jerome, Against Jovinianus, II, 6.

Shaking Off the Dust of Their Feet

Jesus said to the Twelve, “In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!” (Mark 6:10-11).

Matthew adds some details to Jesus’ instructions: “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!” (Matthew 10:11-15)

John Chrysostom made¹²⁹ some observations on the limits imposed on the Apostles. They were required to stay with someone who is worthy, which benefits both the Apostles and their hosts; both end up being honored for this.

“It doesn’t follow from My saying, ‘The workman is worthy of his food’, that I have opened all men’s doors to you; but I do require you to observe limits. This will profit you both regarding your credit and your maintenance. If the person you stay with is worthy, he will surely give you food; especially when you ask nothing¹³⁰ beyond mere necessities.”

“He not only requires them to seek out worthy persons, but also not to change houses; this way they won’t bother him that is receiving them, or get the reputation for gluttony and self-indulgence. He declared this by saying, ‘There stay until you leave’. Notice how He made the Apostles honorable by this, and He made those that received them careful; those that receive the Apostles are the gainers, both in honor and in advantage. As champions of godliness, and preachers to the whole world, Jesus trained the Apostles to practice moderation, and made them objects of love.”

“Because you are teachers, do not wait to be greeted by others, but be first in showing that respect. Implying that this is not a mere greeting, but a blessing, Jesus said, ‘If the house is worthy, your peace shall come upon it’. But if it deals insolently, its first punishment will be not to have the benefit of your peace; and the second, that it shall suffer the doom of Sodom. ‘Shaking off the dust of your feet’ refers to a witness to those who reject the Apostles regarding the long journey which they had traveled for their sake.”

Chrysostom also pointed out¹³¹ what happens when an Apostle shakes off the dust of his feet in testimony against someone. The feet of the saints are holy; shaking off their dust serves to inflict punishment.

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 8.

¹³⁰ The Twelve Apostles plus the Seventy and many of the Unmercenary Healers lived a life of prayer and fasting. Typically this meant that they would eat a little bread and water every few days. Asking for nothing beyond “necessities” refers to quite a bit less than most people require.

¹³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XIV, Moral.

“Monasteries are houses of mourning. There is sackcloth and ashes; there is solitude; there is no laughter, no pressure of worldly business. There is fasting, and sleeping on the ground; there is no impure savor of rich food, no bloodshed, no tumult, no disturbance, or crowding. There is a serene harbor. They are as lights shining from a lofty place to mariners far off. They are stationed at the port, drawing all men to their own calm, and preserving from shipwreck those who gaze on them, and not letting those walk in darkness that look there. Go to them, and make friends with them; embrace their holy feet, more honorable to touch than the heads of others. If some clasp the feet of statues, because they bear but a likeness of the king, will you not clasp his feet who has Christ within him, and be saved? The Saints’ feet are holy, though they are poor men, but not even the head of the profane is honorable. Such power to produce effects is there in the feet of the Saints, that when they shake off the dust of their feet, they inflict punishment. When a saint is among us, let us not be ashamed of anything that belongs to him. All are saints, who unite a holy life with a right faith and though they do not work miracles nor cast out demons, still they are saints.”

“Go then to their tabernacles. To go to the monastery of a holy man is to pass, as it were from earth to heaven. We don’t see there what is seen in a private house. That company is free from all impurity. There is silence and profound quiet. The words ‘mine and yours’ are not in use among them. If you remain there a whole day or even two, the more pleasure you will enjoy.”

Chrysostom also noted¹³² that a special kind of “Peace” is given by the Apostles. This Peace is pronounced in most Christian Churches: “Peace be to all”; the response is “And to your spirit”.

“This is said not of the apostles alone, but also of the saints afterwards. This peace both comes and flies away again. It follows those who courageously speak well of those that teach, and also those who are worthy to receive. It is a huge loss, not to enjoy such peace. This peace the prophet proclaims, ‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace’ (Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15). Then to explain the value as part of the Gospel he added, ‘That bring glad tidings of good things’. This peace Christ also declared to be great, when He said, ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you’ (John 14:27). We should do all things, so as to enjoy it, both at home and in Church. In Church the presiding minister gives peace. We should receive it with readily in heart before communion. Not to impart it after communion¹³³ is disgusting; how much more disgusting to repel him that pronounces it! For us the presbyter sits, for us the teacher stands laboring. What plea then will we have, for not giving him so much welcome as to listen to Him?”

More Tolerable for Sodom at Judgment Day

Referring to the mission of the Twelve, Jesus stated, “Whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from that city, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against

¹³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXII, 9.

¹³³ This refers to the “Kiss of Peace” just before the Eucharist.

them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!” (Mark 6:11)

Jesus also “rebuked the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:20-24).

John Chrysostom stated¹³⁴ that Jesus doesn’t add Sodom with the others for no reason, but to aggravate the charge against them. It is a very great proof of wickedness, when not only of them that now are, but even of all those that have ever been wicked, none are found so bad as they.

John Chrysostom stated¹³⁵ why Jesus compared the people of his day to those of Sodom and Tyre & Sidon. The people of Capernaum were shown a much greater light than Sodom, and therefore more was required of them.

“Jesus didn’t add Sodom with the others for no reason, but to aggravate the charge against them. It is a very great proof of wickedness, when not only of them that live now, but even of all those that ever lived in wickedness, none are found as bad as they.”

“God has appointed a punishment worse than that of the Sodomites, if we won’t receive the strangers that come to us; I mean, when He commanded the Apostles to shake off the dust of their feet: and very fitly. Although the Sodomites committed a great transgression, yet it was before the Law and grace. But we, after so much care shown towards us, of what indulgence should we be worthy, showing so much inhospitality, and shutting our doors against them that are in need, and before our doors our ears? We do this not against the poor only, but against the Apostles themselves? Therefore we do it to the poor, because we do it even to the Apostles. Whereas Paul is read, and we don’t listen; whereas John preaches, and we don’t hear; when will we receive a poor man, if we will not receive an Apostle?”

Irenaeus of Lyons stated¹³⁶ that the reason it will be more tolerable for Sodom is because of the additional grace given to people following Christ’s Advent – which they then rejected. This also implies that there will be different levels of punishment for those who reject Him in ignorance.

“He gives to those who believe on Him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14), but He causes the unfruitful fig-tree immediately to dry up (Mark 11:13-23). In the days of Noah He justly brought on the deluge for the purpose of extinguishing that most infamous race of men then existent, who could not bring forth fruit to God. He acted as He did in order that He might put a check on the sins of these men, but that at the same time He might preserve the archetype, the race of Adam. It was He who rained fire and brimstone from heaven, in the days of Lot, on Sodom and Gomorrah, ‘an example of the righteous judgment

¹³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXVII, 6.

¹³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXVII, 6-7.

¹³⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xxxvi, 4.

of God' (Jude 1:7), that all may know, 'that every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' (Matthew 3:10). It is He who says, that it will be more tolerable for Sodom in the general judgment than for those who beheld His wonders, and did not believe on Him, nor receive His doctrine. Since He gave by His advent a greater privilege to those who believed on Him, and who do His will, so also did He point out that those who did not believe on Him should have a more severe punishment in the judgment. Thus He extended equal justice to all, and He expects more from those to whom He gives more. By means of His advent, He has poured upon the human race the greater gift of paternal grace."

John Chrysostom stated¹³⁷ that the judgment to be imposed on those who didn't receive them was a great comfort and a confidence boost to the Twelve since it emphasized the importance of their mission.

"Had we been some great number, instead of just twelve; had we been wise, skilled in rhetoric, and mighty in speech, instead of 'unlearned and ignorant'; had we been kings, with armies and abundance of wealth; how could we have persuaded any, without kindling up wars far worse than civil wars? (Matthew 10:21) Though we were to despise our own safety, who will listen to us? But none of these things did they either think or say, but simply yielded and obeyed. This came not from their virtue only, but also of the wisdom of their Teacher. Notice how to each of the fearful things He gave an encouragement; as in the case of those who didn't receive them He said, 'It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city!' (Matthew 10:15) When He said, 'You shall be brought before governors and kings', He added, 'for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles' (Matthew 10:18). This is no small consolation, that they are suffering these things both for Christ, and for the Gentiles' conviction. Thus God, though no one notices, is found to be everywhere doing His own works. These things were a comfort to them, not that they desired the punishment of other men, but that they might have ground of confidence, as sure to have Him everywhere present with them, who had both foretold these things."

John Chrysostom continued to say¹³⁸ that even though the Sodomites died a horrible death, they are not delivered from judgment; only that they can expect a less severe judgment than those who rejected Christ after the Incarnation.

"How did He 'break to pieces the brazen gates, and crushed the iron bars?' (Psalm 107:16 LXX) By His body; this was the first time a body was shown to be immortal, and destroying the tyranny of death. This indicates the destruction of the power of death, not the loosening of the sins of those who had died before His coming. If this were not so, but Christ delivered all those that were before Him from hell, how does He say, 'It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city?' (Matthew 10:15) This saying supposes that those are also to be punished; more mildly indeed, yet still that they are to be punished. Yet the Sodomites also suffered in this life the most extreme punishment from the fire and brimstone; nevertheless not even this will deliver them. If this is so with them, much more with those as have suffered nothing."

¹³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXIII, 4.

¹³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXVI, 3.

Anointing with Oil

There are many uses of (olive) oil outlined in Scripture: for healing, at Baptism (both discussed below), and as a symbol for almsgiving¹³⁹ as in the parable of the ten virgins who went out to meet the Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13). In the parable of the ten virgins the oil is almsgiving and the poor are the sellers of the oil. When the Bridegroom finally came, there was no time for the five foolish virgins to buy additional oil from the poor. Other uses of oil were for anointing priests, kings and prophets; as part of the sacrifices; and Jacob anointed a pillar. Each of these other uses of oil is similar to the use of oil at Baptism, indicating the participation of the Holy Spirit.

Use of Holy Oil for Healing

When Jesus sent out the Twelve Apostles, “They went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:12-13).

James, Bishop of Jerusalem in the 1st century, described the use of holy oil in healing the sick:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:14-16).

Martin of Tours (4th century France) used holy oil for healing¹⁴⁰, but some of the other Unmercenary Healers¹⁴¹ and the Apostles did not. This may be due to the lack of availability of olive oil in the places where the Apostles and the Unmercenary Healers worked. In the area of Judea, where the Twelve Apostles were first sent, and where James was Bishop of Jerusalem, olive oil was available.

¹³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 1.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, XI.

John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VI.

¹⁴⁰ Sulpitius Severus, Dialogues, III, 2-3.

Sulpitius Severus, On the Life of St. Martin, 16.

¹⁴¹ For more information on those in the Church referred to as “The Unmercenary Healers”, see Mark Kern, The Unmercenary Healers, St. Athanasius Press, 2001.

Use of Holy Oil at Baptism

Early Christian tradition¹⁴² stated why and how anointing with oil was done at baptism. New converts were anointed with oil for the participation of the Holy Spirit, then baptized into the death of Christ with water, and then sealed with ointment as the seal of the covenants. The new convert also fasted before baptism in imitation of the Lord's 40-day fast after His baptism.

“Now concerning baptism, O bishop, or presbyter, you shall so baptize as the Lord commanded us: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19-20), of the Father who sent, of Christ who came, of the Comforter who testified. But you shall beforehand anoint the person with the holy oil, and afterward baptize him with the water, and in the conclusion shall seal him with the ointment. The anointing with oil may be the participation of the Holy Spirit; the water may be the symbol of the death of Christ; and the ointment may be the seal¹⁴³ of the covenants. But if there is neither oil nor ointment, water is sufficient both for the anointing, and for the seal, and for the confession of Him that is dying together with Christ. But before baptism, let him that is to be baptized fast; for even the Lord, when He was first baptized by John, afterward fasted forty days and forty nights. He was baptized, and then fasted, not having Himself any need of cleansing or fasting, who was by nature pure and holy; but that He might testify the truth to John, and afford an example to us. Our Lord was not baptized into His own passion, death, or resurrection — for none of those things had then happened — but for another purpose. He by His own authority fasted after His baptism, as being the Lord of John. But he who is to be initiated into His death ought first to fast, and then to be baptized. It is not reasonable that he who has been buried with Christ, and is risen again with Him, should appear dejected (i.e. by fasting) at His resurrection.”

Cyril of Jerusalem summarized what the newly illumined are about to partake of. In Baptism, we are anointed, immersed and anointed again; in the anointing, the influence of the demons is driven away. The effect is not just the forgiveness of sins as in the Baptism of John, but the putting on of Christ also. As partakers of Christ, we are called by His Name and given the Holy Spirit. Just like the bread of the Eucharist is no longer mere bread, but the Body of Christ; so also the oil is no longer simple oil, but it is Christ's gift of grace. Just as Christ went out to defeat Satan after His Baptism, so we put on the whole armor of the Holy Spirit to stand against the power of our adversary after our Baptism.

“When we were stripped at Baptism¹⁴⁴, we were anointed with exorcised oil¹⁴⁵, from our head to your feet, and were made partakers of the good olive tree, Jesus Christ. We were cut off from the wild olive tree¹⁴⁶, and grafted into the good one, and were made to share the fatness of the true olive tree (Romans 11:17). The

¹⁴² Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VII, ii, 22; III, ii, 17.

¹⁴³ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace in “Introduction to Cyril of Jerusalem”, IV, 6, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995, p. xxv stated: The “Unction” was regarded in the Greek-speaking Church as the chief part. In the Latin-speaking Church the name Confirmation is of later date, and indicates that greater importance was then attached to the “Laying on of Hands” with prayer.

¹⁴⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XX, 3.

¹⁴⁵ For further discussion, see Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, VII, ii, 22.

¹⁴⁶ For further discussion, see Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, x, 1-2.

exorcised oil therefore was a symbol of the participation of the fatness of Christ, driving away every trace of hostile influence. The breathing of the saints and the invocation of the Name of God, like fiercest flame, scorch and drive out evil spirits. So also this exorcised oil receives such virtue by the invocation of God and by prayer, as not only to burn and cleanse away the traces of sins, but also to chase away all the invisible powers of the evil one.”

“Let no one then suppose that Baptism¹⁴⁷ is merely the grace of remission of sins, or that of adoption. The Baptism of John was a baptism conferring only remission of sins (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3); Baptism in the Church purges our sins, ministers to us the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is the counterpart of the sufferings of Christ. For this cause Paul said, ‘Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death’ (Romans 6:3-4). These words he spoke to some who thought that Baptism grants us the remission of sins and adoption, but does not have the fellowship, by representation, of Christ’s true sufferings.”

“Having been baptized into Christ¹⁴⁸, and put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), we have been made conformable to the Son of God; for God predestined us to adoption as sons (Ephesians 1:5), and will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body (Philippians 3:21). Having therefore become partakers of Christ (Hebrews 3:14), we are properly called Christs, and of us God said, ‘Touch not My Christs’ (Psalm 105:15); that is, My anointed ones. Now we have been made Christs, by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit; and all things have been done in us by imitation, because we are images of Christ. He washed in the river Jordan, and imparted the fragrance of His Godhead to the waters; He came up from them, and the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His being lighted on Him, like resting on like. To us in like manner, after we had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given Unction, the same as that wherewith Christ was anointed; and this is the Holy Spirit. As Isaiah said in the person of the Lord, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me; He has sent Me to preach glad tidings to the poor’” (Isaiah 61:1 LXX).

“And as Christ was in reality crucified¹⁴⁹, and buried, and raised, and we are in Baptism accounted worthy of being crucified, buried, and raised together with Him in a likeness, so is it with the unction also. As He was anointed with an oil of gladness, that is, with the Holy Spirit, called oil of gladness, because He is the author of spiritual gladness, so we were anointed with ointment, having been made partakers and fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9), fellow citizens and fellow heirs (Ephesians 2:19, 3:6) of Christ.”

“Beware of supposing that this is plain ointment¹⁵⁰. As the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is no longer mere bread, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, after invocation, but it is Christ’s gift of grace. By the coming of the Holy Spirit, it is made fit to impart His Divine Nature. This ointment is symbolically applied to our forehead and our other senses; while our body is anointed with the visible ointment, our soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.”

¹⁴⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XX, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XXI, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XXI, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XXI, 3.

“We are first anointed on the forehead¹⁵¹ that we might be delivered from the shame, which the first man, who transgressed, bore about with him everywhere; ‘with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Then on your ears; that you might receive the ears which are quick to hear the Divine Mysteries, of which Isaiah said, ‘The Lord gave me an ear to hear’ (Isaiah 50:4 LXX); and the Lord Jesus in the Gospel, ‘He who has ears to hear let him hear!’ (Matthew 11:15) Then on the nostrils; that receiving the sacred ointment you may say, We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15). Afterwards on your chest; that having put on the breast-plate of righteousness, you may stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:14, 11). For as Christ after His Baptism, and the visitation of the Holy Spirit, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise you, after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the whole armor of the Holy Spirit, are to stand against the power of the adversary, and vanquish it, saying, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’” (Philippians 4:13).

Basil the Great stated¹⁵² that there is a great deal of unpublished teaching handed down from the Apostles regarding Baptism. The awesome dignity of the mysteries was preserved by silence, since those things that the uninitiated were not even allowed to look at was hardly likely to be publicly paraded in written documents.

“Of the beliefs and practices which are preserved in the Church, some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us ‘in a mystery’ by the tradition of the Apostles; and both of these in relation to the true Faith have the same force.”

“Who has taught us in writing to sign with the sign of the cross those who have trusted in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ? What writing has taught us to turn to the East at the prayer? Which of the saints has left us in writing the words of the invocation at the displaying of the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing? We are not content with what the Apostle or the Gospel has recorded, but we add other words as being of great importance to the validity of the ministry; these we derive from unwritten teaching. Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of the chrism, and besides this the catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? By what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? Where does the tradition of baptizing three times come from? From what Scripture do we derive the renunciation of Satan and his angels? Does not this come from that unpublished and secret teaching which our fathers guarded in a silence out of the reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation? Well had they learned the lesson that the awesome dignity of the mysteries is best preserved by silence. What the uninitiated are not even allowed to look at was hardly likely to be publicly paraded about in written documents.”

Cyprian of Carthage wrote¹⁵³ about baptism by heretics: it is meaningless since there is no Church or altar to sanctify the anointing oil and the Eucharist.

¹⁵¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XXI, 4.

¹⁵² Basil the Great, *On the Spirit*, XXVII, 66.

¹⁵³ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles*, LXIX, 2.

“The questioning which is put in baptism is a witness of the truth. When we say, ‘Do you believe in eternal life and remission of sins through the holy Church?’ we mean that remission of sins is not granted except in the Church; among heretics, where there is no Church, sins cannot be put away. It is necessary that he should be anointed who is baptized; so that, having received the chrism, that is, the anointing (1 John 2:27), he may be anointed by God, and have in him the grace of Christ. The Eucharist and the oil, from which the baptized are anointed, are sanctified on the altar. But he cannot sanctify the creature with oil, who has neither an altar nor a church; thus there can be no spiritual anointing among heretics, since it is clear that the oil cannot be sanctified nor the Eucharist celebrated at all among them. It is written, ‘Let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head’ (Psalm 141:5 LXX), which the Holy Spirit before forewarned, lest anyone going out of the way and wandering from the path of truth should be anointed by heretics and adversaries of Christ. What prayer can a priest who is impious and a sinner offer for a baptized person? It is written, ‘God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him’ (John 9:31). Who can give what he himself doesn’t have? How can he discharge spiritual functions who himself has lost the Holy Spirit?”

Epistle: 1 Peter 5:6-14

This Reading is often used in the West for the 7th Sunday of Easter.

Background for Peter’s First Epistle

The Apostle Peter made several missionary journeys to Cappadocia, Galatia, Pontus, Bithynia and Northeastern Asia Minor prior to his imprisonment¹⁵⁴ by Herod in 44 AD. In Peter’s First Epistle, he addresses the Epistle to the Churches in this region of his early missionary journeys. He wrote, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1-2).

We might also note that Jews along with Gentile converts to Judaism from this region had been in Jerusalem for Pentecost 30 AD when Peter spoke to the crowd (Acts 2:7-11). Peter’s preaching resulted in 3000 people from these outlying regions being added to the Faith, and most of these people stayed in Jerusalem, having all things in common (Acts 2:44, 4:32). During the persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen one-year later¹⁵⁵, the Church was scattered, and many of these people may have gone home. During the year they spent in Jerusalem, Peter probably got to know some of them well, and this may have prompted his visit to these regions first.

¹⁵⁴ For details, see the Study: Mark Kern, The Apostle Peter, St. Athanasius Press, 2005, p. 191.

¹⁵⁵ That the stoning of Stephen occurred this early, see:

Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

In Peter's First Epistle, he addressed his words to "The Pilgrims of the Dispersion". "The Dispersion" refers to those Jews living outside the borders of Israel among Greek-speaking people (John 7:35). These Jews living abroad made it a very high priority to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year according to the command in the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 16:16-17, Exodus 23:14-17, 34:21-24). For Peter to call them "Pilgrims" implies that many of them had been to Jerusalem regularly, and some of them may have been in Jerusalem when Peter spoke at Pentecost, 30 AD.

Silvanus of the Seventy, the Courier of the Epistle

We get a clue regarding when Peter wrote his First Epistle from some of the people he mentions. Peter closes his Epistle with the words:

"By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand. She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you*, greets you; and *so does* Mark, my son. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen (1 Peter 5:12-14).

Silvanus was the courier of the Epistle, and he was also one of the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20). Some people have speculated that Silvanus, the courier of Peter's Epistle, and Silas, who accompanied Paul on his Second Missionary Journey, were the same person. This comes from a study of the names themselves, which are a Greek version of the Hebrew name, Saul. Transliterated from Aramaic to Greek, *Sheelah* becomes *Silas* in Greek, where a contracted form of Silas is Silvan or Silvanus (Greek: *Silouanos*). Thus both Silas and Silvanus were Greek-speaking Hebrews.

According to a number of traditional sources, there were two members of the original Seventy Apostles: Silas and Silvanus, and both are remembered¹⁵⁶ on the same day. Silas is remembered for his work as Bishop of Corinth, and Silvanus is remembered for his work as Bishop of Thessalonica. What makes it confusing is that Paul calls Silas "Silvanus" several times in his Epistles (2 Corinthians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Since one name is a contracted form of the other, this is understandable.

What is Babylon?

Peter also referred to the Evangelist Mark in his First Epistle, as being with him in "Babylon". There is a city in Egypt named "Babylon", and it is possible that Peter and Mark could have been there together at one time. But this reference to "Babylon" refers to the city of Rome, where Peter was appalled¹⁵⁷ at the extent of the corruption in Rome when he first arrived there. Eusebius wrote¹⁵⁸

"And Peter makes mention of Mark in his first epistle, which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure,

¹⁵⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 30.

Hippolytus, On the Seventy, 16, 17.

Dorotheus of Tyre, The Choosing of the Seventy Holy Apostles, 15, 17.

¹⁵⁷ For a description of this corruption, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Peter, St. Athanasius Press, 2005, pp. 220-221.

¹⁵⁸ Eusebius, Church History, II, 15.

Babylon, as he does in the following words: ‘She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you*, greets you; and *so does* Mark my son’” (1 Peter 5:13-14).

Other early writers also interpreted¹⁵⁹ the reference to “Babylon” in Revelation to the city of Rome. John wrote of a woman called, “Mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth” (Revelation 17:5). She was carried by a beast, which has seven heads and ten horns, where the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits (Revelation 17:7, 9). Since Rome, as a city, was built on seven hills or mountains, “Babylon” was interpreted as “Rome”.

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, clarified¹⁶⁰ the term “Babylon” as referring to the things of this world, where citizens of “Babylon” can be found doing task-work in the Church and vice versa.

“It commonly comes to pass that the citizens of Babylon serve in task-work for Jerusalem, while the citizens of Jerusalem, which is of the heavenly country, do the task-work of Babylon. When the elect of God, endowed with moral excellence, distinguished for moderation, seeking not their own gain, do their earthly business, what else is it but that the citizens of holy Jerusalem serve in the work of Babylon? And when some, unbridled in immorality, hold places of holy dignity, and in the very things, which they seem to do well, seek praise to themselves, what else is it but that the citizens of Babylon execute the task-work of the heavenly Jerusalem? For so Judas mixed with the apostles, preached the Redeemer of the human race, and did signs with the rest. But, because he had been a citizen of Babylon, he executed his work as task-work for the heavenly Jerusalem. But on the other hand, the Patriarch Joseph, who was carried into Egypt, served an earthly court, bore the charge of administration in temporal things, and exhibited whatever was justly due to a transitory kingdom. But, because he was still a citizen of holy Jerusalem, he administered the service of Babylon, in the way of task-work only”.

Gregory of Nyssa noted¹⁶¹ that “Babylon” means “confusion”, such as occurred at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4-9). Gregory referred to the heretics Montanus and Sabellius of his day as “Babylon” because they pervert and confuse the truth of the Church.

“It seems to me that lamentations should be chanted when this imitator of Jehoiakim draws away those whom he deceives to this new kind of idolatry, banishing them from their ancestral inheritance, — I mean the Faith. They too, in a way corresponding to the Scriptural record, are carried away captive to Babylon from Jerusalem that is above, — that is from the Church of God to this confusion of pernicious doctrines, — for Babylon means ‘confusion’. And even as Jehoiakim was mutilated¹⁶², so this man, having voluntarily deprived himself of the light of

¹⁵⁹ Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, I, vii, 9.

Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 3, 13.

Jerome, *Letter to Paula*, XLVI, 12.

¹⁶⁰ Gregory the Great, *Epistles*, VIII, 35.

¹⁶¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, X, 2.

Also Gregory of Nyssa, “Funeral Oration on Meletius”, *Oratorical Works*, V.

¹⁶² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, X, vi, 3 (97). Jehoiakim was a vicious man who encouraged the abomination of idolatry. For violating his oath to King Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim was thrown over the city walls and left to rot without burial. Jeremiah had predicted that Jehoiakim would be “buried with a donkey’s burial, dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 22:19).

the truth, has become a prey to the Babylonian despot. The poor wretch never learned that the Gospel commands us to behold eternal life alike in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.

The Date for the Writing of Peter’s First Epistle

If Peter visited Cappadocia, Galatia, Pontus, Bithynia and Northeastern Asia Minor in the early 40’s AD, and if he sent the Evangelist Mark to Egypt in the mid 40’s AD, there is a rather narrow window for the time of his drafting his First Epistle. Unless the Evangelist Mark returned to Rome for a brief time, for which we don’t have any record, Peter must have drafted his First Epistle by the mid 40’s AD¹⁶³.

Prior to the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Nero in the 60’s AD, most of the persecution came at the hands of or at the instigation of the Jews. This is a consistent theme on Paul’s missionary journeys as recorded in Acts. Peter’s First Epistle was written to people living a few miles North of the cities Paul visited on his First Missionary Journey, and they were suffering similar persecution (1 Peter 1:6, 3:9, 3:16, 4:12-19). We might infer that this persecution was also incited and organized by the Jews in that area (1 Peter 2:7-8).

While Peter addressed his Epistle to the “Dispersion”, referring to Jews living abroad, Gentiles are included also (1 Peter 2:9-10). The Gentiles, who had not believed, were also involved in the persecution (1 Peter 2:12). There was a temptation on the part of the Christians to fight back. Peter cautioned them not to do this, but to endure it patiently, just as Christ had done (1 Peter 3:13-18).

Peter wrote of those (plural) who “have evangelized you” (1 Peter 1:12). That would be Andrew, Peter himself, and several of the Seventy, including the Evangelist Mark, who accompanied Peter. Peter also addressed the Bishops that he and Andrew had ordained for this region (1 Peter 5:1-4). He wrote instructions to them using words that are similar to the words Paul used in writing to Timothy and Titus.

Significant by its absence are two things: First, there is no reference to the work of the Apostle Paul in cities a few miles away. In Peter’s Second Epistle, probably written to the people in the same region, who were familiar with his First Epistle (2 Peter 3:1), Peter acknowledged the work of “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15). The lack of reference to Paul’s work suggests that Peter wrote his first Epistle before Paul started his missionary journeys to that area. Paul began his First Missionary Journey in c. 46 AD and arrived in Asia Minor in c. 47 AD.

Second is the lack of any reference to the Council in Jerusalem in c. 48 AD, and the decrees regarding the Gentiles, where the Gentiles were not obligated to be circumcised or to follow the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:18-21). By this time, the Lord has already instructed Peter regarding Cornelius and the Gentiles (Acts 10). And Peter has put this instruction to good use in his Epistle. He writes to the “Dispersion”, but the Gentiles are included! All of this implies a date for the drafting of Peter’s First Epistle in the mid 40’s AD.

¹⁶³ Most scholars put the drafting of Peter’s first Epistle a little later than this. In doing so, they don’t consider the details of what is happening at the time such as is outlined here.

The Necessity for Humility

Peter stated, “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

The subject of humility is also brought out in the Gospel Lesson for the 17th Sunday of Pentecost (q.v.) using the details of the Canaanite woman asking for Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Here we will deal to other references in the Scriptures to humility

John Chrysostom used¹⁶⁴ the example of the Pharisee and the publican to compare the results of humility with that of pride. The Pharisee had a spotless life, but was handicapped with pride; the publican had a life of great sin, but came with humility and repentance. Because of his pride, the Pharisee was rejected and lost the benefit of his spotless life; because of his humility, the publican was accepted in spite of his life of sin. This has huge implications for us! Unless we start with a foundation of humility, we are building a foundation for our life on sand. If we couple a life of righteousness with humility, we will be greatly beloved of God.

“In comparing the Pharisee and the publican, we could picture them as two chariots, one representing virtue and one representing vice. We note how great is the gain of humbleness of mind, and how great is the damage of pride. Even when linked with righteousness, fasting and tithes, the chariot of the Pharisee fell behind. The publican’s chariot, even when yoked with sin, outstripped the Pharisee’s pair, even although the charioteer it had was a poor one. What was worse than the publican? Since he made his soul contrite, and called himself a sinner, which indeed he was, he surpassed the Pharisee, who had both fasting, tithes, and was removed from any vice. The Pharisee was removed from the greed of gain and robbery, but he had rooted his soul to the mother of all evils -- vain-glory and pride.”

“On this account he fell behind in the running. The Pharisee was like a ship, that had run through innumerable tsunamis, and had escaped many storms; then in the mouth of the harbor it was dashed against some rock, and lost the whole treasure which was stowed away in her. So did this Pharisee, after having undergone the labors of fasting, and all the rest of his virtue, since he did not master his tongue, in the harbor he underwent shipwreck with his cargo. In going home from prayer, where he ought to have derived gain, he was rather greatly damaged.”

“Knowing these things, beloved, even if we should have mounted to the absolute pinnacle of virtue, let us consider ourselves last of all. We need to learn that pride is able to cast down even from heaven him who doesn’t pay attention; conversely humbleness of mind bears up on high from the very abyss of sins, him who knows how to be sober. This is what placed the publican before the Pharisee; while humbleness of mind and the acknowledgment of his own sins brought the robber into Paradise before the Apostles. If the effect of confession of sins is so great, they who are conscious of many good qualities in their life, yet humble their own souls, how great crowns will they not win? When sinfulness is put together with humbleness of mind it runs with such ease as to out-strip righteousness combined with pride. If therefore you put it with righteousness, where will it not reach? Through how many heavens will it not pass? On the other hand if pride yoked with righteousness, by the excess weight of its own wickedness, was strong

¹⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Homily Concerning Lowliness of Mind, 1-2.

enough to drag it down; if it were put together with sinfulness, into how deep a hell will it not drag him who has it? These things I say, not that we should be careless with righteousness, but that we should avoid pride; not that we should sin, but that we should be sober-minded. Humbleness of mind is the foundation of the love of wisdom. Even if you should have built a superstructure of things innumerable; almsgiving, prayers, fasting, even all virtue; unless humility has first been laid as a foundation, all will be built upon it in vain and for no purpose. It will fall down easily, like that building which had been built on the sand (Matthew 7:26). All of our good deeds need this; there is no one separate from this that will be able to stand. Even if you should mention temperance, virginity, despising of money, anything whatever, all are unclean, accursed and loathsome, if humbleness of mind is absent. Therefore let us take her with us, in words, in deeds, in thoughts, and with this let us build these graces.”

Jesus was invited to the house of Simon the Pharisee for dinner; while Jesus was there a prostitute washed His feet with her tears, wiped His feet with her hair and anointed His feet with costly fragrant oil. Simon was proudly indignant that Jesus didn't know who was touching Him. Jesus explained to Simon that those who are forgiven much also love much; then He forgave the woman. Ephraim the Syrian used¹⁶⁵ this example to explain how to teach humility to someone who isn't humble:

“Instead of a stern reproof Jesus spoke a parable of persuasion to that Pharisee. He spoke the parable to him tenderly, that he, though willful, might unawares be enticed to correct his perversities. For the waters that are frozen by the force of a cold wind, the heat of the sun gently dissolves. So our Lord did not at once oppose him harshly, that he might not give occasion to the rebellious to rebel again. But by coaxing He brought him under the yoke, that when he had been yoked, He might work with him; though rebellious, he might work according to His will¹⁶⁶. Because Simon was proudly minded, our Lord began humbly with him, that He might not teach him proudly. If that Pharisee retained the Pharisees' pride, how could our Lord cause him to acquire humility, when the treasure of humility was not in hand? Since our Lord was teaching humility to all men, He showed that His treasury was free from every form of pride. This was for our sakes, that He might teach us, that whatever treasuries pride enters into, it is by boastfulness that it gains access to them. On this account Jesus said, ‘Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing’ (Matthew 6:3). Our Lord did not employ harsh reproof, because His coming was of grace; He did not refrain from reproof, because His later coming will be of retribution. He caused men to fear in His coming of humility; because it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands when He shall come in flaming fire. But our Lord gave most of His help by persuasion rather than by reproof.”

Ambrose of Milan observed¹⁶⁷ that there is a mystery associated with a humble life. Peter encountered this mystery when the Lord washed his feet; he didn't understand at first. As we identify with our Lord and Master and imitate Him, we begin to understand the mystery.

¹⁶⁵ Ephraim the Syrian, Three Homilies: On Our Lord, I, 22.

¹⁶⁶ After Pentecost, Simon the Pharisee took the name of Julian, was ordained Bishop of Gaul by the Apostles and spent the rest of his life evangelizing in what is now France.

¹⁶⁷ Ambrose of Milan, Concerning the Mysteries, VI, 31-33.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:5). When He came to Simon Peter, Peter said, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’ (John 13:8) He did not perceive the mystery, and therefore he refused the service; he thought that the humility of the servant would be injured, if he patiently allowed the Lord to serve him. The Lord answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me’. Hearing this, Peter replied, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head’. Jesus answered, ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet to be completely clean’” (John 13:9-10).

“Peter was clean, but he must wash his feet, for he had a propensity to sin that he inherited from the first man¹⁶⁸, when the serpent overthrew him and persuaded him to sin. His feet were therefore washed, as they are in repentance and confession; for our own sins are remitted through baptism.”

“Observe at the same time that the mystery consists in the office of humility, for Christ says, ‘If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet’ (John 13:14). Since the Author of Salvation Himself redeemed us through His obedience, how much more ought we His servants to offer the service of our humility and obedience.”

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:3). John Chrysostom stated¹⁶⁹ that “poor in spirit” means humility, where the “spirit” refers to the soul. There are different kinds of humility; some are forced to be humble; others do it willingly. The latter is commended with the sense of sacrifice like the three youths in the Babylonian furnace. In contrast to this are those who imitate the devil in pride, which leads to great wickedness. Even Adam did this in the Garden; Christ became the remedy by teaching us humility.

“What is meant by ‘the poor in spirit?’ The humble and contrite in mind! For by ‘spirit’ He has here designated the soul, and the faculty of choice. Many are not humble willingly, but are compelled by stress of circumstances; this is not praiseworthy. He blesses them first, who by choice humble themselves. Why did Jesus not say, ‘the humble’, but rather ‘the poor?’ He means here those who are awestruck, and tremble at the commandments of God. God accepted Isaiah in just this way, ‘To who will I have respect, but to the humble and meek, and the man that trembles at my words?’ (Isaiah 66:2 LXX) There are many kinds of humility: someone may be humble in his own eyes; another, with excess of lowliness. It is this last lowliness of mind which that blessed prophet commends, picturing to us the temper that is not merely subdued, but utterly broken, when he said, ‘Sacrifice to God is a broken spirit: a broken and humbled heart God will not despise’ (Psalm 51:17 LXX). The Three Young Men offered this to God as a great sacrifice, ‘Yet

¹⁶⁸ The Roman Catholic Church, follows the teachings of Augustine on “original sin”, which is an inherited sin. In Orthodoxy, “original sin” is a heretical concept. Man inherited Adam’s mortality and corruption, and hence the passions and a propensity to sin. But Adam’s sin in the Garden was his, not ours. Men can refuse to sin and thus live a holy life. “Original sin” says that men are born guilty. Because of the doctrine of “original sin”, the Roman Catholic Church also had to add “the Immaculate Conception” of the Virgin Mary so that she could qualify in terms of personal holiness to give birth to the Son of God. Otherwise the Son of God would have been born with original sin. An Immaculate Conception is impossible to justify from historical documents.

¹⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XV, 2-3.

with a contrite soul and humbled spirit¹⁷⁰ may we receive mercy' (Daniel 3:39). This Christ now blesses."

"The greatest of evils, and those which make havoc of the whole world, had their beginning with pride; the devil, not being such before, did thus become a devil (Isaiah 14:12-14). Paul plainly declared, 'Lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil' (1 Timothy 3:6). Adam, the first man, puffed up by the devil with these hopes, was made an example of, and became mortal. Expecting to become a God, he lost even what he had; God criticized him with this, mocking his folly, said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us' (Genesis 3:22). Everyone that came after wrecked himself with impiety, fancying some equality with God. Since this was the stronghold of our evil, and the root and fountain of all wickedness, God prepared a remedy suitable to the disease, laid this law first as a strong and safe foundation. For this being fixed as a base, the builder in security lays on it all the rest. But if this be taken away, though a man reach to the Heavens in his course of life, it is all easily undermined, and issues in a grievous end. Though fasting, prayer, almsgiving, temperance, any other good thing whatever, be gathered together in you; without humility all fall away and perish."

"It was this very thing that took place in the instance of the Pharisee. For even after he had arrived at the very summit, he "went down" with the loss of all, because he had not the mother of virtues: for as pride is the fountain of all wickedness, so is humility the principle of all virtue. Therefore Christ begins with this, pulling up boasting by the root out of the soul of His hearers."

Practical Examples of Humility

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, gave¹⁷¹ his bishops and priests some guidelines on how to admonish and encourage people in the way of humility. There is a vast gap between the humble and the haughty: the humble ascend to the likeness of God; the haughty sink in imitation of their father the devil. This is a really important mystery to understand in the Christian life.

"Differently to be admonished are the humble and the haughty. To the humble insinuate how true is that excellence which they hold in hoping for it; to the haughty intimate how temporal glory is as nothing, and even when embracing it they don't hold it. Let the humble hear how eternal are the things that they long for, how transitory the things which they despise; let the haughty hear how transitory are the things they court, how eternal the things they lose. Let the humble hear from the authoritative voice of the Truth, 'Everyone that humbles himself shall be exalted'. Let the haughty hear, 'Everyone that exalts himself shall be humbled' (Luke 18:14). Let the humble hear, 'Before honor is humility' (Proverbs 15:33); let the haughty hear, 'Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall' (Proverbs 16:18). Let the humble hear, 'To whom will I have respect, but to the humble and meek, and the man that trembles at my words' (Isaiah 66:2 LXX)? Let the haughty hear, 'How can he who is dust and ashes be proud?' (Ecclesiasticus 10:9 LXX) Let the humble hear, 'God regards the lowly'. Let the haughty hear, 'But the proud He knows from afar' (Psalm 138:6). Let the humble hear, 'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for

¹⁷⁰ In the Septuagint (LXX) this is Daniel 3:39. In the Hebrew Bible, this has been separated into the Apocryphal document called "The Song of the Three Children".

¹⁷¹ Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 17.

many' (Matthew 20:28); let the haughty hear, 'The beginning of all sin is pride' (Ecclesiasticus 10:13 LXX). Let the humble hear that our Redeemer 'humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross' (Philippians 2:8); let the haughty hear what is written concerning their head, 'He is king over all the children of pride' (Job 41:34). The pride of the devil became the occasion of our perdition, and the humility of God has been found the argument for our redemption. For our enemy, having been created among all things, desired to appear exalted above all things; but our Redeemer, remaining great above all things, stooped to become little among all things."

"Let the humble, then, be told that, when they abase themselves, they ascend to the likeness of God; let the haughty be told that, when they exalt themselves, they fall into imitation of that apostate angel. What, then, is more debased than haughtiness; while it stretches itself above itself, is flattened out below the stature of true loftiness? What is more outstanding than humility; while it depresses itself to the lowest, it joins itself to its Maker who remains above the highest?"

Ambrose of Milan gave¹⁷² some practical guidelines for maintaining our humility, even in the face of false charges being piled up against us. The evil spirits are directing these things, and we conquer by being silent.

"Let a man guard his humility. If he is unwilling to appear too humble, he thinks as follows: 'Am I to allow this man to despise me, and say such things to my face against me, as though I could not open my mouth against him? Why should I not say something whereby I can hurt him? Am I to let him do me wrong, as though I were not manly? Is he to bring charges against me as though I could not bring together worse ones against him?'"

"Whoever speaks like this is not gentle and humble, nor is he without temptation. The tempter stirs him up, and puts such thoughts in his heart. Often the evil spirit employs another person, and gets him to say such things to him; but set your foot firm on the rock. Although a slave should abuse, let the just man be silent, and if a weak man utter insults, let him be silent, and if a poor man should make accusations, let him not answer. These are the weapons of the just man, so that he may conquer by giving way."

John Chrysostom stated¹⁷³ that Paul, in his humility, and in spite of visions of the Third Heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2) did not consider himself to have really comprehended much about God. But if Paul didn't apprehend the things of God, who did? In contrast, the Pharisee in the parable was puffed up about his good deeds, and lost the benefit of having done them.

"Jesus says, 'When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do"' (Luke 17:10). Paul, the Teacher of the world, said, 'I do not count myself to have apprehended' (Philippians 3:13). He alone can be humble-minded, who has persuaded himself that he has done no great thing, however many things he may have done, who thinks that he has not reached perfection. Many are elated on account of their humility; but let not us be so affected. Have you done an act of humility? Don't be proud of it, otherwise all the merit of it is lost. Such was the

¹⁷² Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, v, 19-20.

¹⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philemon, II, Moral.

Pharisee; he was puffed up because he gave his tithes to the poor, and he lost all the merit of it” (Luke 18:12).

Chrysostom also compared¹⁷⁴ Satan with the Apostle Paul: one exalted himself; the other humbled himself. The one who humbled himself dominated the other in his life.

“Satan was an angel, who exalted himself (Isaiah 14:12-14). Was he not humbled beyond all other? Has he not the earth as his place? Is he not condemned and accused by all? Paul was a man, and humbled himself. Is he not admired? Is he not praised? Is he not the friend of Christ? Did he not do greater things than Christ? (Acts 19:12) Did he not often command the devil like he would a captive slave? (1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Timothy 1:20) Did he not drag him about as an executioner? Did he not hold him up to scorn? Did he not hold his head bruised under his feet?” (Romans 16:20)

Our Enemy is Like a Roaring Lion

Most people today are not very familiar with the ferocity of lions. The only lions they ever see are the lazy creatures in zoos that are always sleeping. More realistic are the lions described in Daniel’s encounter with the Lions’ Den. When Daniel was there an angel shut the lions’ mouths (Daniel 6:22). But when the Babylonian king realized the treachery of Daniel’s enemies, and fed his enemies to the lions, the lions broke all their bones¹⁷⁵ before they even reached the bottom of the den (Daniel 6:24).

Peter said, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The image conveyed here is like the lions breaking our bones as they devour us. The roar of a lion, usually at night to advertise its presence, can be heard 5 miles away¹⁷⁶. We can just imagine how terrifying this very loud roar can be in the dark when the lion is up close.

Athanasius of Alexandria described¹⁷⁷ how the demons operate; they are utterly hateful when seen in their true light, but they try to conceal themselves in the things of God.

“The inventor of wickedness, the great spirit of evil, the devil, is utterly hateful; as soon as he shows himself, he is rejected by all men — as a serpent, as a dragon, as a lion seeking whom he may seize upon and devour. He conceals and covers what he really is, and craftily impersonates that Name which all men desire, so that deceiving by a false appearance, he may fix fast in his own chains those whom he has led astray. He is like one that desires to kidnap the children of others during the absence of their parents; he impersonates their appearance and puts a cheat on the affections of the children to carry them far away and destroy them. This evil and wily spirit, the devil, knows the love which men bear to the truth, impersonates its appearance, and so spreads his own poison among those that follow after him.”

“Thus he deceived Eve, not speaking his own, but artfully adopting the words of God, and perverting their meaning. Thus he suggested evil to the wife of

¹⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians*, VII, vv. 9-11.

¹⁷⁵ The jaws of lions are so strong that they can crunch up and eat the bones of their prey.

¹⁷⁶ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion>.

¹⁷⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *To the Bishops of Egypt*, I, 1-2.

Job, persuading her to pretend affection for her husband, while he taught her to blaspheme God. Thus the crafty spirit mocks men by false displays, delusion and drawing each into his own pit of wickedness.”

John Chrysostom noted¹⁷⁸ how Scripture describes our adversity: like a hungry ferocious lion, a poisonous snake and a huge dragon. But yet we can trample him with the Lord’s help.

“The devil and his entire host are ferocious and unclean in their inclination. When Scripture shows us his rapacity, it says, ‘As a roaring lion he walks about, seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8). When it shows his poisonous, deadly, and destructive nature, it calls him a snake and a scorpion; ‘I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy’ (Luke 10:19). When it represents his strength as well as his venom, it calls him a dragon, ‘There go the ships; *and* this dragon that thou hast made to play in it’ (Psalm 104:26 LXX). Scripture everywhere calls him a dragon, a crooked serpent, and an adder (Psalm 74:13, 14 LXX). He is a beast of many folds, varied in his devices; his strength is great, he moves all things, he disturbs all things, he turns all things upside down (Isaiah 27:1; Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2). But fear not, neither be afraid; watch only, and he will be as a sparrow; for He said, ‘tread upon serpents and scorpions’. If we wish, He causes him to be trodden down under our feet.”

Chrysostom also described¹⁷⁹ how the demons use the passions of this life against us. The passions become to us like ravenous lions that are very difficult to control; we need the Blood of Christ (the Eucharist), the Scriptures and almsgiving¹⁸⁰ to help us.

“The Blood of Christ, if it is received with full assurance, has power to extinguish every disease; we should complement this with carefully listening to the divine Scriptures, and follow that with almsgiving. By means of all these things we shall be enabled to deaden the passions that mar our soul. Then only shall we live; for now we are in no better state than dead men. While those passions live, we live too, but we must certainly perish. Unless we first kill them here, they will be sure to kill us in the next life; or rather even in this life they will exact of us the utmost penalty. Every such passion is both cruel, tyrannical and insatiable, and never ceases to devour us every day. ‘Their teeth are the teeth of a lion’ (Joel 1:6), or rather far more fierce. The lion, as soon as he is satisfied, leaves the carcass that has fallen his way; but these passions are never satisfied, nor do they leave the man whom they have seized, until they have set him next to the devil. Whether it is with the love of women, riches or glory that anyone is entangled with, the passions cause him to laugh at hell and despise the kingdom of God, that he may work the will of these passions.”

Ambrose of Milan noted¹⁸¹ the principle of intimidation used by the demons. If wounds on our bodies can draw us away from the earnestness of our faith, he has accomplished his purpose. As an example of this, Ambrose noted the Patriarch Job, who was covered with wounds and sores over his whole body. Job did not give in to abandoning his faith, and he was rewarded for his steadfastness both in this life and in the age to come.

¹⁷⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, VI, vv. 5-8.

¹⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, IV, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Someone might ask how almsgiving helps. The answer is that it shifts the focus from our selfish needs to the needs of others.

¹⁸¹ Ambrose of Milan, Sermon Against Auxentius on the Giving Up of the Basilicas, 4.

Ambrose of Milan cautioned¹⁸² people to consider what image we project to others. Do we project the image of the demons: anger and the image of wickedness; desire for money and the appearance of vice? Better it is to project no part of the image of demons.

“Don’t let the demons find their image in you; don’t let them find fury nor rage; for in these exists the likeness of wickedness. ‘Our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8). Don’t let them not find desire for gold, or heaps of money, or the appearance of vices, lest he take from you the voice of liberty. The voice of true liberty is heard when you can say, ‘The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me’” (John 14:30).

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹⁸³ that catechumens need to be prepared with their feet shod with the Gospel of peace so that the bites of the serpent won’t hurt as they come to the holy mysteries.

“Great is the Baptism that lies before you: a ransom to captives; a remission of offenses; a death of sin; a new-birth of the soul; a garment of light; a holy indissoluble seal; a chariot to heaven; the delight of Paradise; a welcome into the kingdom; the gift of adoption! But there is a serpent by the side of the road watching those who pass by; beware lest he bite you with unbelief. He sees so many receiving salvation, and is seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). You are coming to the Father of Spirits, but you are going past that serpent. How then may you pass him? Have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15); that even if he bite, he may not hurt you. Have faith in-dwelling, steadfast hope, a strong sandal, that you may pass the enemy and enter the presence of your Lord. Prepare your own heart for reception of teaching, for fellowship in holy mysteries.”

Cyril also warned¹⁸⁴ that there are many wolves around looking to devour us, and who sow tares among wheat (Matthew 13:25-40) in order to envelop us. The terms “wolf”, “serpent” and “lion” are used interchangeably.

“Vice mimics virtue and the tares strive to be thought wheat, growing like wheat in appearance, but being detected by good judges from the taste. The devil also transfigures himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); not that he may re-ascend to where he was, for having made his heart hard as an anvil (Job 41:24), he has a will that cannot repent. He does this in order that he may envelop those who are living an Angelic life in the midst of blindness, and a pestilent condition of unbelief. Many wolves are going about in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15), not so their claws and teeth; clad in their soft skin, they deceive the innocent by their appearance, and shed upon them from their fangs the destructive poison of ungodliness. We therefore need divine grace, and a sober mind, and of eyes that see, lest from eating tares as wheat we suffer harm from ignorance. If we take the wolf to be a sheep, we become his prey; from supposing the destroying Devil to be a beneficent Angel we are devoured. As the Scripture said, he walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). This is the cause of the Church’s admonitions, the cause of the present instructions, and of the lessons which are read.”

¹⁸² Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, xlix, 250.

¹⁸³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, “Procatechesis”, 16.

¹⁸⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IV, 1.

We Will All Suffer

Peter stated, “Resist the devil, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:9-10).

In our age, we don’t like to deal with the idea of suffering; but the suffering of the people of God is addressed by the Scriptures too often to ignore. Among the Church Fathers, two have had much more to say than the rest. These are Cyprian of Carthage, who lived through the intense persecution of Decius (c. 250 AD) plus a major outbreak of the plague, and John Chrysostom, who lived through a time of peace¹⁸⁵.

Many people might respond to suffering by saying, “Why me?” It interrupts our plans and would seem to conflict with our interpretation of the Scripture where Christ said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). This is usually translated into visions of peaceful times and still waters with no hardship of any kind. But is that what Christ promised?

Cyprian of Carthage pointed out¹⁸⁶ the words of Christ regarding suffering that most people generally don’t want to hear today. Our willingness to accept suffering is related to our life in the age to come; refusal to accept this is akin to denying Christ.

“Peter taught that persecution occurs for the sake of proving us and that we should, by the example of righteous men who have gone before us, be joined to the love of God by death and sufferings. He wrote, ‘Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified’ (1 Peter 4:12-14). Now the apostles taught us those things which they themselves also learned from the Lord’s precepts and the heavenly commands. The Lord Himself strengthens us, ‘There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life’ (Luke 18:29-30). Again He says, ‘Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! Indeed your reward *is* great in heaven’” (Luke 6:22-23).

“The Lord desired that we should rejoice and leap for joy in persecutions, because, when persecutions occur, then are given the crowns of faith; then the soldiers of God are proven; then the heavens are opened to martyrs. We have not given our name to warfare that we ought only to think about peace, and draw back

¹⁸⁵ John Chrysostom died in the harsh conditions of his exile by the Empress Eudoxia, against whom he was outspoken for her vanity and arrogance.

¹⁸⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to the People of Thibar, LV, 2-3.

from war, when in this warfare the Lord walked first -- the Teacher of humility, endurance and suffering. What He taught to be done, He first of all did, and what He exhorts to suffer, He Himself first suffered for us. Let it be before your eyes, beloved brethren, that He who alone has received all judgment from the Father. He will come to judge, has already declared the decree of His judgment and of His future recognition, foretelling and testifying that He will confess those before His Father who confess Him, and will deny those who deny Him.”

Yet many people suffer for Christ but don't realize that they are doing so. They will be rewarded by their Master just as Job was. There are many aspects of suffering as outlined by the Church Fathers that will be explored in this section. Throughout all aspects of suffering, there is the hand of our ancient enemies, the demons, who delight in the suffering of the faithful.

Cyprian continued to point out¹⁸⁷ that those who refuse to suffer are doing the will of the devil, they are deserting or rebelling against God, and their eternal home will be with the devil.

“Paul announced that we shall receive greater things than anything that we here either do or suffer, ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come which shall be revealed in us’ (Romans 8:18). When that revelation shall come, when that glory of God shall shine upon us, we shall be happy and joyful, honored with the condescension of God. Those others will remain guilty and wretched, who, either as deserters from God or rebels against Him, have done the will of the devil; so that it is necessary for them to be tormented with the devil himself in unquenchable fire.”

John Chrysostom listed¹⁸⁸ eight reasons why the saints are afflicted. Some of these may seem obvious, but others may not be so obvious except from God's viewpoint. God permits us to suffer evil:

1. That we may not too easily be exalted by the greatness of our good works and miracles.
2. That others may not have a greater opinion of us than belongs to human nature, and take us to be gods and not men.
3. That the power of God may be made clear, in prevailing, overcoming, and advancing the word preached, through the effects of men who are infirm and in bonds.
4. That our endurance may become more striking, serving God, as we do, not for a reward; but showing even such right-mindedness as to give proof of our undiminished good will towards Him after so many evils.
5. That our minds may be wise concerning the doctrine of a resurrection. When you see a just man, one abounding in virtue, suffering ten thousand evils, and thus departing the present life, you are altogether compelled, though unwillingly, to think somewhat of the future judgment. If men do not allow those who have labored for themselves to depart without wages and recompense, much more God will not let those who have so greatly labored to be sent away uncrowned. If He cannot reward those for the recompense of their labors in this life, there must be a time, after the end of the life here, in which they will receive the recompense of their present labors.
6. That all who fall into adversity may be consoled, by looking at such persons, by remembering what sufferings have befallen them.

¹⁸⁷ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to the People of Thibar, LV, 10.

¹⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, I, 14.

7. That when we exhort you to the virtue of such persons, and we say to every one of you, 'Imitate Paul, emulate Peter', you may not, on account of the surpassing character of their good works, slothfully shrink from such an imitation of them, as thinking them to have been partakers of a different nature.
8. That when it is necessary to call any blessed, or the opposite, we may learn whom we ought to account happy, and whom unhappy and wretched.

What Do the Scriptures Say?

Let us review what the Scriptures have to say about the suffering of the righteous. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament address how blessed of God it is to voluntarily suffer for His Name's sake. The Scriptures promise huge rewards for doing so! The rewards are so huge that the saints actually rejoice when they are given the opportunity to suffer for His Name's sake.

From the Scriptures, suffering is not an option; it will happen in some form, and we need to be ready to accept whatever form it takes. Jesus spoke to His disciples many times about taking up their Cross in following Him, and in losing their life for His Name's sake. We will explore how the Church Fathers have interpreted Jesus' words in how they apply to us. Some quotes from the Scriptures:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works' (Matthew 16:24-27).

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:10-12).

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master'. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also (John 15:20).

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

The Apostles departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41).

I will show Paul how many things he must suffer for My name's sake (Acts 9:16).

If children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:17-18).

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29)

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24)

This is clear evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you (2 Thessalonians 1:5-6).

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:24)

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended by* the Lord - - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and *your* "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment. Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms (James 5:10-13).

What credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps (1 Peter 2:20-21).

If you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:14-18).

Paul stated, "I sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know" (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4). John Chrysostom zeroed in¹⁸⁹ on Paul's words "We are appointed to this!" We are appointed for affliction, but we sometimes act like we are appointed for an easy and carefree life. The more we have suffered for Christ's sake, the more we will shine in His Presence.

"Let us hear who have ears to hear. The Christian is appointed to this. Concerning all the faithful is this said, 'We are appointed to this!' Yet we, as if we were appointed for ease, think it strange if we suffer anything; and yet what reasons have we for thinking that this is anything strange? 'For no season of affliction or

¹⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, III, Moral.

temptation has overtaken us, but what is common to man' (1 Corinthians 10:13). It is a fit season for us to say, 'We have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin' (Hebrews 12:4). Or rather, this is not reasonable for us to say. Instead it might be said, 'We have not yet despised riches'. To them these words were said with reason, when they had lost all their own possessions; but this is said to those who retain theirs. Who has been robbed of his riches for Christ's sake? Who has been beaten? Who has been insulted, even in words, I mean? What have we to boast of? What confidences have we to say anything? So many things Christ suffered for us when we were enemies. What can we show that we have suffered for Him? We have suffered nothing, but we have received infinite good things from Him. How shall we have confidence in that Day? We know that the soldier, when he can show numberless wounds and scars, will then be able to shine in the presence of the king? But if he has no good action to show, though he may have done no harm, he will take rank among the least."

Christ's Sufferings as a Model

Immediately following Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" Jesus began to introduce His disciples to the notion of suffering on their part. When Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from suffering, Jesus called that the work of Satan.

"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'. Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it'" (Matthew 16:21-25).

Irenaeus of Lyons, who lived through the intense persecution of Marcus Aurelius, stated¹⁹⁰ that persecution of the followers of Christ is the normal mode of the Christian life. This is something we cannot shrink from and still call ourselves Christians.

"Jesus did not say to take up our Cross to acknowledge the cross as some vague general thing, but with respect to the suffering which He Himself underwent, and that His disciples should endure. He implied that His disciples must suffer for His sake. He implied this also when He said to the Jews, 'Therefore I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify' (Matthew 23:34). To the disciples He said, 'You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake; they shall scourge some of you, and slay you, and persecute you from city to city' (Matthew 10:17-23). He knew both those who would suffer persecution, and He knew those who would be scourged and slain because of Him. He did not speak of any other cross, but of the suffering which He would Himself undergo first, and His disciples afterwards. For this purpose did He give them this exhortation: 'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matthew 10:28). Thus

¹⁹⁰ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III, xviii, 4-5.

He exhorted them to hold fast those professions of faith which they had made in reference to Him. He promised to confess before His Father those who would confess His name before men; but He declared that He would deny those who would deny Him, and would be ashamed of those who would be ashamed to confess Him. Some have expressed rashness, pouring contempt on the martyrs, berating those who are slain on account of the confession of the Lord, and who suffer all things predicted by the Lord. Those who strive to follow the footprints of the Lord's passion, having become martyrs of the suffering One; these we enroll with the martyrs themselves. When inquisition is made for their blood (Psalm 9:12 LXX), and they shall attain glory, then all who have cast a slur on their martyrdom shall be confounded by Christ. Jesus exclaimed at the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' (Luke 23:34); the long-suffering, patience, compassion, and goodness of Christ are exhibited, since He both suffered, and did Himself acquit those who had maltreated Him. The Word of God said to us, 'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you' (Matthew 5:44); Himself did this very thing on the cross, loving the human race to such a degree, that He even prayed for those putting Him to death."

Paul stated, "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10). John Chrysostom noted¹⁹¹ that the "Captain", Who is Jesus, leads by example in suffering. For Him to suffer as He did was a far greater thing than His creating the world out of nothing. By this He showed us that just as He was made perfect through suffering, so we will also. Being "made perfect" refers to the giving up of His life for our salvation, the One for the many.

"The Captain of their salvation', refers to 'the Cause of their salvation'. Notice how great is the space between Him and us! He is a Son, and we are sons; but He saves, and we are saved. Notice how He both brings us together and then separates us. 'Bringing many sons to glory' (Hebrews 2:10), where he brings us together; 'the Captain of their salvation', where he separates. 'To make perfect through sufferings' is a perfecting, and a cause of salvation. Notice that to suffer affliction is not the portion of those who are utterly forsaken; it was by this that God first honored His Son by leading Him through sufferings! Truly His taking flesh to suffer what He did suffer is a far greater thing than making the world, and creating it out of nothing. This is a token of His loving-kindness, and Paul points this out. 'He raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'" (Ephesians 2:6-7).

"It was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering' (Hebrews 2:10). He means that it became Him who takes tender care, and brought all things into being, to give up the Son for the salvation of the rest, the One for the many. However the way he expressed himself is, 'to make perfect through sufferings', showing that the suffering for anyone not only profits 'him', but he himself also becomes more glorious and more perfect."

¹⁹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 4.

Chrysostom also marveled¹⁹² at the Apostles, how Jesus warned them that the whole world would be armed against them, but they didn't leave. Instead they realized that they would need to suffer for their Lord as they saw Him suffer for them.

“Jesus prepared His followers to be vigilant, assigning to them to suffer wrong, and permitting it to be inflicted on others. He taught them the victory is in suffering evil, and that His glorious trophies are thereby set up. He didn't say at all, ‘Fight and resist those that bother you’, but only, ‘You shall suffer the utmost evils’ (Matthew 10:16-23). How great is the power of Him that speaks! How great the self-command of them that listen! We have great cause to marvel, how they did not immediately leave Him on hearing these things, apt as they were to be startled at every sound, and who had never gone further than the Lake of Gennesaret, around which they used to fish. How is it that they did not reflect, and say to themselves, ‘Where after all this are we to flee? The courts of justice are against us; the kings, the governors, the synagogues of the Jews, the nations of the Gentiles, the rulers, and the ruled are against us’. By saying this He not only forewarned them of Palestine, and the evils there, but made known also the wars throughout the world, saying, ‘You shall be brought before kings and governors’; signifying that to the Gentiles also He was to send them as heralds. ‘You have made the world as our enemy; You have armed against us all them that dwell on the earth, peoples, tyrants, kings’”.

¹⁹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXIII, 4.

The Sufferings of Job

The sufferings of the Patriarch Job are often used as a model of how the people of God should approach hardship. All suffering has its origin with the forces of evil, and this is plainly apparent with Job. As Job suffered, he had no idea why he had been inflicted with so much evil all of a sudden. We may feel the same way, and we can greatly benefit from a careful study of the life of Job.

Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. His ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). 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, Job would curse God to His face (Job 1:11). So the Lord allowed Satan to send several “messengers” (2 Corinthians 12:7) his way.

First the Sabeans attacked and took all Job’s oxen and donkeys, killing Job’s herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, “the fire of God” fell from heaven and burned up all the sheep, killing the shepherds with the sheep (Job 1:16). Third, the Chaldean raiders came and took all Job’s camels, killing the keepers who were defending. Lastly, while Job’s children were having a feast at the house of the oldest son “on his day” (probably his birthday, Job 1:4) a great wind came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Thus these messengers were two personal ones (the Sabeans and the Chaldeans) and two miraculous ones (the fire of God and the great wind). Today’s insurance industry would refer to these last two as “acts of God” even though their source is an act of Satan.

John Chrysostom noted¹⁹³ how excruciating it was for Job when his calamities came. If we can imitate Job when similar things happen to us, God will be merciful to us and defend us, and the Devil will leave us alone.

“If we have a sick son we constantly attend him. If he dies, we are there to hear him uttering his last words, and stand beside him while he draws his last breath and closes his eyes. However, Job did not see his ten children breathing their last gasp, but the house became the common grave of them all (Job 1:18-19). On the same table brains and blood were poured out, pieces of wood, tiles, dust, and fragments of flesh; all these things were mingled together. Nevertheless after such great calamities Job was not insolent, ‘The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away: as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; blessed be the name of the Lord’ (Job 1:21). Let us talk like this also after every event that befalls us; whether it is loss of property, infirmity of body, insult, false accusation or any other form of evil incident to mankind. If we practice this spiritual wisdom, we shall never experience any evil, even if we undergo countless sufferings, but the gain will be greater than the loss; the good things will exceed the evil. By these words you will cause God to be merciful to you, and He will defend you against the tyranny of Satan. As soon as your tongue has uttered these words the Devil leaves you. When he has departed, the cloud of dejection also is dispelled and the thoughts which afflict us hurry off in company with him. In addition to all this we will win all manner of blessings both here and in Heaven.”

¹⁹³ John Chrysostom, Homily on the Paralytic Let Down Through the Roof, 8.

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). Satan replied that if Job were plagued with diseases on his bone and his flesh, he would curse God to His face (Job 2:5). So the Lord allowed Satan to send more "messengers" to Job.

The next "messenger from Satan" was a physical one: "severe 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. Job was now completely disfigured by these diseases, and his wife was no comfort at all. "When much time had passed, Job's 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, look, your memorial is abolished from the earth, *even thy* sons and daughters, the pangs and pains of my womb which I bore in vain with sorrows. 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. 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). Following this, they sat down with him for seven days without saying a word, for they saw that his pain was very great (Job 2:13). For Job, it was so bad he wished he had never been born (Job 3:1).

Following this came the last messenger: the inquisition. Job's three friends thought that Job had some secret sin that brought all this evil down on his own head. Eliphaz the Temanite suggested that those who plow iniquity and sow trouble harvest it. The innocent and upright don't perish for no reason (Job 4:7-8). Bilhad the Shuhite suggested that perhaps Job's sons had sinned and had gotten their just reward. If Job, himself were without guilt, surely God would have, by now, restored his righteous estate. After all, God will not reject a man of integrity nor will He support evil doers (Job 8:4, 6, 20). Job claimed he was innocent. Zephan the Naamathite suggested that the Lord knows false men without investigating their circumstances. "If you would direct your heart right and spread out your hand to Him (that is, in prayer); if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away and do not let wickedness dwell in your tents (Job 11:4, 11-14). 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 commented¹⁹⁴ that "the reproaches of Job's friends appeared more grievous 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.

¹⁹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 3.

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 own 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. And as a result, Job was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11).

John Chrysostom compared¹⁹⁵ the sufferings of Job to the homeless poor of his day; Job was a lot worse off. The worst factor was that Job was conscious of no reason for his calamity, and it seemed that God was punishing him for being the most righteous man on earth (Job 1:8, 2:3). His body was rotting away and he was in constant pain as he sat on the dunghill; yet he was very humble when God informed him about what had happened.

“Poverty, and the pain which arises from it, seems to be the most unendurable of all sufferings. Everywhere all men bewail this. Job was poorer than the outcasts¹⁹⁶ at the baths, and those who sleep in the ashes of the furnace, poorer in fact than all men. These have one ragged garment, but he sat naked; he had only the garment which nature supplies, and this the Devil destroyed with a distressing kind of decay. These poor folk are at least under the roof of the porches at the baths as a shelter, but Job passed his nights in the open air. What is still greater, the poor are conscious of many terrible evils within themselves, but Job was conscious of no charges against himself. We notice this in each of the things that happened to him, a thing which caused him greater pain, and produced more perplexity; the ignorance of the reason of what took place. The outcasts have many things with which to reproach themselves, and this contributes no little to consolation in calamity; to be conscious in oneself of being punished justly. But Job was deprived of this consolation; he exhibited a conversation full of virtue, and endured the fate of those who had dared to do extreme wickedness.”

“Job overcame extreme poverty, in comparison with which it is impossible to find anyone. What could be poorer than the naked who has not even a roof over him? He did not even enjoy the bare ground, but he sat on the dunghill. Whenever we see ourselves come to poverty, consider the suffering of the just one, and immediately we shall rise up, and shake off every thought of despondency. This one calamity therefore seems to men to be the model of all sufferings together. Who was ever so disabled? Who endured such disease? Who saw anyone else receive so great an affliction? No one! Little by little his body was wasted, and a stream of worms on every side issued from his limbs; the running was constant. The evil smell which surrounded him was strong; his body was being destroyed little by little, decaying with such putrefaction, it used to make food distasteful so

¹⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, Against Those Who Say that Demons Govern Human Affairs, III, 5.

¹⁹⁶ The public baths were heated with a furnace; the 4th century homeless hung out around the baths for warmth and shelter.

that he was not able to enjoy the nourishment which was given to him. He said, ‘I perceive my food as the smell of a lion *to be* loathsome’ (Job 6:7 LXX). Whenever we fall into weakness, remember Job’s body and saintly flesh. It was saintly and pure, even when it had so many wounds. Job was especially troubled and disturbed to think that the just God, who had in every way been served by him, was at war with him. He was not able to find any reasonable pretext for what took place; when at least he afterwards learned the cause, notice what piety he showed. God said to him, ‘Do you think that I have dealt with you in any other way, than that you might appear to be righteous?’ (Job 40:8 LXX) Conscious-stricken Job said, ‘I will lay my hand upon my mouth. I have spoken once; but I will not do so a second time’ (Job 40:4-5 LXX), and again ‘I have heard the report of You by the ear before; but now my eye has seen You. Therefore I have counted myself vile, and have fainted; I esteem myself dust and ashes’” (Job 42:5-6 LXX).

John Chrysostom stated¹⁹⁷ that no one can really harm us, since they need the permission of the Lord to even attempt this. The demons couldn’t harm Job, even with a herculean effort. The only way we are harmed is by our own hands.

“Satan, who is full of such great malice, set all his instruments in motion, discharged all his weapons, and poured out all the evils incident to man in a superlative degree upon the family and the person of that righteous man Job. But nevertheless he did him no injury, but rather profited him. How shall anyone be able to accuse any man saying that they have suffered injury at his hands? The only way we are injured is by our own hands.”

“Can someone, then, harm the moral condition of the soul? If a man suffers that kind of damage, the damage does not come from another but proceeds from within, and from the man himself. How so? When anyone, who is beaten by another, deprived of his goods, or given some other grievous insult, utters a blasphemous word, he certainly sustains great damage from this. Nevertheless this does not proceed from him who has inflicted the insult, but from the man’s own littleness of soul. No man, if he were infinitely wicked, could attack anyone more wickedly or more bitterly than Satan, that revengeful demon. Yet this cruel demon didn’t have power to upset or overthrow Job, who lived before the Law¹⁹⁸, and before the time of grace. Although he discharged so many and such bitter weapons against Job from all quarters, Job’s force of nobility of soul prevailed”

“If anyone is harmed and injured he certainly suffers this at his own hands, not at the hands of others, even if there are countless multitudes injuring and insulting him. If he does not suffer injury at his own hands, all the creatures that inhabit the earth and sea, if they combined to attack him, would not be able to hurt one who is vigilant and sober in the Lord.”

Suffering on Behalf of Christ

Why do we need to suffer on behalf of Christ? From the Scriptures, the issue is that two kingdoms are in conflict: the Kingdom of God versus the kingdoms of this world. Some think that it is merely a case of good versus evil, but it is more than just this. We are given the choice of

¹⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man Who Does not Injure Himself, 3, 5, 17.

¹⁹⁸ Job lived prior to Moses during the 430 years when Israel was in Egypt.

which we give our allegiance to; if we choose the Kingdom of God, the kingdoms of this world attempt to change our mind.

The Scriptures state, “The Apostles departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41). Jesus said, “I will show Paul how many things he must suffer for My name's sake” (Acts 9:16). Paul said, “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29). And also, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24).

John Chrysostom stated¹⁹⁹ that it is a transcendent honor that surpasses all things to suffer on behalf of Christ. It is better to be suffering for Christ than to be standing in His Presence around the Throne of God. This Christ Himself did and this the Apostle Paul did. It is this perspective that we today have a very difficult time grasping.

“I am ashamed to compare earthly riches and golden attire to Paul’s bonds. Speaking of heavenly glories, this alone is a great reward: to suffer these hardships for the sake of the Beloved. They that love are more delighted to suffer for, than to be honored by those they love. To fully understand these things belongs to the holy company of the Apostles and to them alone. Listen to what Luke said, ‘They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name’ (Acts 5:41). To all others it seems to be foolishness, that to suffer dishonor is to be counted worthy. But to those that understand the love of Christ, this is of all things the most blessed. Were any to offer me my choice, the whole Heaven or Paul’s chain, that chain I would prefer. Were any to ask whether he should place me on high with the Angels or with Paul in his bonds, the prison I would choose. Were any about to change me into one of those powers that are in Heaven round about the throne, or into such a prisoner as this, such a prisoner I would choose to be. Nothing is more blessed than that chain. I wish that I could be at this moment in that very spot, for Paul’s chains are said to be still in existence, to behold and admire those men, for their love of Christ. Would that I could behold the chains, at which the devils fear and tremble, but which Angels reverence. Nothing is nobler than to suffer any evil for Christ’s sake. I don’t count Paul as happy when he was ‘caught up to Paradise’ (2 Corinthians 12:4), as when he was cast into the dungeon. I don’t count him as happy because he heard ‘inexpressible words’, as when he endured those bonds. I don’t count him as happy because he was ‘caught up into the Third Heaven’ (2 Corinthians 12:2), as I count him happy for those bonds’ sake. That the bonds are greater than those visions, listen to how he himself knew this. He didn’t say, I who ‘heard inexpressible words’, beseech you; but ‘I, the prisoner²⁰⁰ in the Lord, beseech you’ (Ephesians 4:1). He doesn’t inscribe this in all his Epistles because he wasn’t always in prison. I consider it more desirable to suffer evil for Christ’s sake, than to receive honor at Christ’s hands. This is transcendent honor; this is glory that surpasses all things. If He Himself who became a servant for my sake, and ‘made Himself of no reputation’ (Philippians 2:7), yet didn’t think Himself so truly in glory, as when He

¹⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, vv. 1-2.

²⁰⁰ See also Ephesians 3:1, 2 Timothy 1:8, Philemon 1:1. Paul is in essence saying that he counts the prison experience as greater than hearing the inexpressible words. This is quite a statement!

was crucified for my sake, what ought not I to endure? Listen to His own words: ‘Father, Glorify Your Son’ (John 17:1). What is this You are saying? You are being led to the cross with thieves and grave-robbers; You endure the death of the accursed; You are about to be spit on and punched; and You call this glory? Yes, He said, for I suffer these things for My beloved ones, and I count them true glory. If He who loved the miserable and wretched calls this glory, not to be on His Father’s throne, but in dishonor, -- if this was His glory, and if this He set before the other, much more ought I to regard these things as glory.”

Cyprian of Carthage noted²⁰¹ that even babies can suffer for Christ’s sake. This illustrates that those suffering for Christ are innocent.

“The nativity of Christ witnessed the martyrdom of infants²⁰², so that they who were two years old and under were slain for His Name’s sake (Matthew 2:16-18). An age not yet fit for battle appeared fit for the crown. That it might be clear that those who are slain for Christ’s sake are innocent, innocent infancy was put to death for His Name’s sake. No one is free from the peril of persecution, when even these infants accomplished martyrdom. But how serious is the case of a Christian man, if he, a servant, is unwilling to suffer, when his Master first suffered. We should be unwilling to suffer for our own sins, when He who had no sin of His own suffered for us! The Son of God suffered that He might make us sons of God; we need to be willing to suffer that we may continue to be a son of God!”

Chrysostom took a close look²⁰³ at the words of Christ and the things the Apostles did regarding suffering. They rejoiced in terrible suffering! Today we would not think about rejoicing and throwing a party after we had been badly beaten; but that’s what they did! This is a dramatically different mindset than we have today!

“Consider a man who has nothing for which to condemn himself, but cherishes a good conscience, and yearns after the future state, and the fulfillment of those good hopes. What will be able to throw such a person into sadness? Death? The expectation of this is so far from grieving him, that it makes him more joyful; for he knows that the arrival of death is a release from labor, and a speeding toward the crowns and rewards laid up for those who have contended in the race of piety and virtue. How about the untimely end of his children? No, he will also bear this nobly, and will take up the words of Job, ‘The Lord has taken away: as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; blessed be the name of the Lord’ (Job 1:21). Much less can the loss of money, dishonor, reproaches, or false accusations at any time affect a soul so great and noble! Not even anguish of body; the Apostles were scourged, yet they were not made sad. Instead of being made sad, they considered their scourging, as a ground of additional pleasure. ‘They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name’ (Acts 5:41). Did any person insult and revile such a one? He was taught by Christ to rejoice in these reviling. ‘Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted

²⁰¹ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to the People of Thibar, LV, 6.

²⁰² From Nicholai Velimirovic, The Prologue from Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 29, Herod slew 14,000 babies in his effort to kill the infant Jesus.

²⁰³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XVIII, 7, 10.

the prophets who were before you' (Matthew 5:11-12). But suppose a man has fallen into disease? Well, he has heard another admonishing, and saying, 'In disease and poverty trust in Him; for gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men are tested in the furnace of humiliation'" (Ecclesiasticus 2:4-5 LXX).

"Again, Christ speaks: 'Blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the humble; blessed are the meek; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake' (Matthew 5:3-10). Notice how the divine laws everywhere pronounce blessed none of the rich, the well-born, or the possessors of glory, but the man who has gotten hold of virtue. What is required of us is, that in everything we do or suffer, the fear of God should be the foundation. If you implant this as the root, not merely will ease, honor, glory and attention, produce fruit that will be pleasurable to you; but hostilities also, slander, contempt, disgrace, torments, and all things without exception. Just as the roots of trees are bitter in themselves, and yet produce our sweetest fruits, so godly sorrow will bring us an abundant pleasure. They know who have often prayed with anguish and shed tears, what gladness they have reaped; how they purged the conscience; how they rose up with favorable hopes! It is not the nature of the things, but our disposition which tends to make us sad or joyful. If we can render our disposition such as it ought to be, we shall have a pledge for all gladness. With the body, it is not so much the nature of the air, or the things it meets outside the body, but its own internal condition, that either injures or assists it; so also it is in the case of the soul, and much more so. Paul, when he had endured innumerable evils -- ship-wrecks, wars, persecutions, plots, the assaults of robbers, and things too numerous to be recounted -- was so far from grieving or being discontented, that he gloried and rejoiced. He said, 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church' (Colossians 1:24). Again: 'And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance' (Romans 5:3). Now, glorying signifies an extension of pleasure."

The Scripture nowhere says that the Apostles returned rejoicing because they had done miracles, but it does say that they rejoiced that 'they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name' (Acts 5:41). This they were taught by Christ, 'Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven' (Luke 10:20). For the joy indeed is this, to suffer anything for Christ's sake.

Chrysostom noted²⁰⁴ that Christ doesn't deliver us from suffering, but He brings us to the point where we are above it and despise it. We learn to look down on the suffering the Demons put in our path with contempt and scorn, understanding God's much greater purpose. God is teaching us to look with scorn on those arrows of the devil – in whatever form they come. If we think of very strong soldiers who in spite of the tortures they might be experiencing laugh with contempt at their torturers, we understand the bigger picture.

"Notice how Christ does not promise us deliverance from death, but permits us to die, granting us more than if He had not allowed us to suffer it? Deliverance from death is not near so great as persuading men to despise death. He does not push them into dangers, but sets them above dangers, and in a short sentence fixes

²⁰⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXXIV, 2.

in their mind the doctrines that relate to the immortality of the soul. He comforts them also by other considerations.”

“In order that we don’t think that when killed and butchered, we are men forsaken by God to suffer this, He introduced again the argument of God’s providence, ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered’ (Matthew 10:29-30). What is more common than sparrows? Not even these shall be taken without God’s knowledge; nothing that is done is hid from Him. If then He is not ignorant of anything that happens to us, and loves us more truly than a father, and so loves us as to have numbered our hairs; we ought not to be afraid. He said this not that God numbers our hairs, but that He might indicate His perfect knowledge, and His great providence over us. If therefore He knows all the things that are done, and is willing and able to save you, whatever you may have to suffer, think not that as persons forsaken you suffer. It is not His will to deliver you from the terrors, but to persuade you to despise them, since this is, more than anything, deliverance from the terrors.”

Chrysostom also stated²⁰⁵ that there are two meanings to being “dead with Christ”. One meaning refers to Baptism; the other refers to suffering on His behalf, which includes much patient endurance. From the contrary point of view, if we refuse to suffer and thus deny Him, He will also deny us.

“Paul said, ‘If we are died with *Him*, We shall also live with *Him*’ (2 Timothy 2:11). Shall we partake with Him in things laborious and painful; and shall we not in things beneficial? But not even a man would act thus; if one had chosen to suffer affliction and death with him, he wouldn’t refuse him a share in his rest, when he had attained it. But how are we ‘dead with Him?’ This death he means both of that in the Laver of Baptism and that in sufferings. Paul speaks about this in several places: ‘Carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus’ (2 Corinthians 4:10); and ‘We were buried with Him through baptism into death’; and ‘Our old man was crucified with Him’; and ‘We have been united together in the likeness of His death’ (Romans 6:4-6). But he also speaks here of death by trials, and that more especially, for he was also suffering trials when he wrote it. ‘If we have suffered death on His account, shall we not live on His account? This is not to be doubted. ‘If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him,’ (2 Timothy 2:11-12). Not absolutely, we shall reign, but ‘if we suffer’; it is not enough to die once, (Paul died daily,) but there was need of much patient endurance. Timothy especially had need of it. Tell me not, he says, of your first sufferings, but that you continue to suffer.”

“Then on the other side he exhorts Timothy, not from the good, but from the evil. If wicked men were to partake of the same things, this would be no consolation. If having endured they were to reign with Him, this would be fine; but if they didn’t endure, and they were to suffer no worse evil, this would not be enough to affect most men with concern. Therefore he speaks of something more dreadful still. If we deny Him, He will also deny us. So then there is retribution not of good things only, but of the contrary. Consider what it is probable that he will suffer, who is denied in that kingdom. ‘Whoever denies Me before men, him

²⁰⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, V, vv. 11-14.

I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 10:33). The retribution is not equal, though it seems so expressed. For we who deny Him are men, but He who denies us is God; and how great is the distance between God and man!"

Chrysostom further stated²⁰⁶ that someone who curses his persecutor is not pleased to suffer for Christ. By agreeing to suffer for Christ, however, we testify that we are traveling to another life.

“He that curses his persecutor shows that he is not much pleased at suffering this for Christ; he that blesses shows the greatness of his love. Do not abuse him, that you yourself may gain the greater reward. Christ Himself said, ‘Rejoice when men say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake’ (Matthew 5:11). For this reason the Apostles returned with joy not from having been evil spoken of only, but also at having been scourged (Acts 5:40-41). There will be another gain, and that no small one, that you will make, instructing your adversaries by your actions that you are traveling to another life. If he sees you joyous, and elevated, from suffering evil, he will see clearly from the actions that you have other hopes greater than those of this life.”

Paul said, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). Paul also said, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church” (Colossians 1:24). Chrysostom noted²⁰⁷ that Jesus had said, “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do²⁰⁸, because I go to My Father” (John 14:12). Therefore Chrysostom concluded that the people of God will go through greater sufferings²⁰⁹ than Christ did as well as perform greater miracles than He did. This is what Paul meant by “our comfort abounds”.

“What is equal to being scourged for Christ’s sake and holding conversation with God? We are more than match for all things; we gain the better of those who cast us out; we are unconquered by the whole world; and we expect hereafter such good things ‘as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man!’ (1 Corinthians 2:9). What is equal to suffering affliction for godliness’ sake? We receive infinite consolations from God; we are rescued from sins so great and counted worthy of the Spirit, being sanctified and justified; and we regard no man with fear and trembling, and in peril itself we outshine everyone.”

Suffering during Sickness Is Also Suffering for Christ

Our suffering for Christ takes many forms, and some of these forms may go unnoticed. For example, someone who is sick for a long time, and often in pain, yet who is cheerful and

²⁰⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXII, v. 14..

²⁰⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, I, 4.

²⁰⁸ People took handkerchiefs or aprons from Paul to heal the sick (Acts 19:12). People came from all over Judea to be healed by Peter’s shadow (Acts 5:15). These works are often spoken of as “greater than those of Christ”.

²⁰⁹ Paul’s sufferings (2 Corinthians 11:24-28) are sometimes compared to those of Christ as greater than Christ’s.

willing to accept his/her lot, is very much like the Patriarch Job. We shouldn't underestimate what we are dealing with! In everything we should give glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31, 2 Corinthians 4:15, Philippians 2:11).

John Chrysostom stated²¹⁰ that those who are sick and bear it nobly with thanks to God shall receive the same reward as the Apostles who were scourged for His Name's sake. If we love Him sincerely, even the feebleness and pain of sickness will not hinder us.

Call to mind the Apostles; they rejoiced at being scourged, at being driven about and undergoing numberless sufferings, because they were 'counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name' (Acts 5:41). If we are sick, bear it nobly, and thank God for it, we shall receive the same reward as them. But how, when in feebleness and pain, are we to be able to feel grateful to the Lord? We will if we love Him sincerely. If the Three Children who were thrown into the furnace, and others who were in prisons, and in countless other evils, ceased not to give thanks, much more will they who are in a state of disease, be able to do this. For there is not, assuredly there is not, anything which vehement desire does not get the better of. When the desire is that of God, it is higher than anything, and neither fire, nor the sword, nor poverty, nor infirmity, nor death, nor anything else of the kind appears dreadful to one who has gotten this love. But scorning them all, he will fly to heaven, and will have affections no way inferior to those of its inhabitants, seeing nothing else, neither heaven, nor earth, nor sea, but gazing only at the one Beauty of that glory. Neither the vexations of this life present will depress him, nor the things which are attractive and attended with pleasure elate him or puff him up. Let us then love with this love, for there is not anything equal unto it, both for the sake of things present and for the sake of things to come. Or rather, more than for these, for the nature of the love itself!

Chrysostom wrote²¹¹ to Olympias²¹², a young widow, to encourage her in her sickness. She may wish to pray for a speedy death to end her misery, but Chrysostom likened her ordeal to that of Job. What she was doing was the greatest work she had undergone in her life!

"Nothing, Olympias, redounds so much to the credit of anyone as patient endurance in suffering. This is indeed the queen of virtues, and the perfection of crowns; and as it excels all other forms of righteousness, so this particular species of it is more glorious than the rest."

"Remember when Job was delivered over to sickness and sores; then he also longed for death, then he bewailed himself and lamented. You can understand how this kind of suffering is more severe than all others, and this form of patience the highest of all. The Devil himself is aware of this fact; when he perceived that Job remained untroubled and undismayed, he rushed to this as the greatest contest of all. He said that all the other calamities were bearable, such as loss of child, property, or anything else; this is what is meant by the expression 'Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life' (Job 2:4). The deadly blow was when pain was inflicted on a man's body."

²¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, IX, v. 23.

²¹¹ John Chrysostom, Letter #2 to Olympias, 2-3.

²¹² Olympias was a very wealthy woman, married just two years, who decided to devote the rest of her life to helping the poor with many charitable works. Olympias was exiled shortly after Chrysostom in 408 AD for refusing to have communion with Chrysostom's enemies; and like Chrysostom, she also died in exile.

“Do not think therefore that to pray for death now is exempt from blame, but listen to the voice of Paul when he says, ‘To me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you’ (Philippians 1:21-24). For in proportion as the strain of the affliction is increased are the garlands of victory multiplied; in proportion as the gold is heated does it become purified; the longer the merchant makes his voyage on the sea, the larger is the freight which he collects. Do not then think that the labor now allotted to you, which consists in infirmity of body, is a slight one. Rather it is higher than everything which you have undergone.”

“Therefore even if you remain at home, and are set fast in bed, do not consider your life an idle one. You undergo more severe pains than those who are dragged, maltreated, and tortured by executioners, inasmuch as in this excessive infirmity of yours you have a perpetual executioner residing with you.”

Chrysostom also stated²¹³ how it is that we must approach suffering for Christ. However we are afflicted, if we bear it patiently, give thanks, etc., like Job, we do it for Christ. If we are impatient, curse, or complain, we blaspheme.

“How can we suffer for Christ, you ask? If one accuses you falsely, not on account of Christ, yet if you bear it patiently, if you give thanks, if you pray for him, all this you do for Christ. But if you curse him, if you utter discontent, if you attempt to revenge it, though you are not able, it is not for Christ’s sake; you suffer loss, and are deprived of your reward on account of your intention. We are accountable for the disposition of our own minds. For instance, great were the sufferings of Job, yet he suffered with thankfulness; and he was justified, not because he suffered, but because in suffering he endured it thankfully. Another under lighter sufferings, exclaims, is impatient, curses the whole world, and complains against God. He is condemned and sentenced, not because he suffered, but because he blasphemed. He blasphemed, not from any necessity arising from his afflictions, since if necessity arising from events were the cause, Job too must have blasphemed. Since Job, who suffered more severely, did no such thing, it did not come to pass from suffering, but from the man’s weakness of purpose. We need therefore strength of soul; with it, nothing will appear grievous. But if our soul is weak, we find a grievance in everything.”

The Purpose of Suffering

One of the Epistle readings for the Unmercenary Healers²¹⁴ is 2 Timothy 2:1-10. Paul penned his last words before his martyrdom in encouraging Timothy to continue the Apostolic work that he was called to. Paul wrote that he himself had “finished the race” and that “his departure (i.e. martyrdom) was at hand” (2 Timothy 4:6,7). Sometime earlier, Paul had established Timothy as Bishop of Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), and his encouragements to Timothy were:

- Be strong in the Grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1).

²¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IX, v. 8.

²¹⁴ See the Study Mark Kern, The Unmercenary Healers, St. Athanasius Press, 2001. This Study appears on the St. Athanasius web site many times during the year at the Feast Days the various Unmercenary Healers.

- The things you heard from me, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).
- You must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:3).

Why should Timothy, Paul, the Lord, the Twelve and the Unmercenary Healers have to suffer? The answer is that they do this for the sake of those who follow them in the Faith, i.e. for us of today. They help others to see what is beyond this life and what really matters.

John Chrysostom made²¹⁵ some analogies. Wounded soldiers who recover are an encouragement to their fellow soldiers; so holy men and women who bear up patiently under persecution are an encouragement to the Church.

“In war, the Captain who sees his General wounded and recovered again, is much encouraged. Thus it produces some consolation to the faithful, that the Apostle Paul should have been exposed to great suffering and not rendered weak by the utmost of them. Timothy heard that Paul, who possessed so great powers (see Acts 19:11-12), was a prisoner and afflicted, yet was not impatient or discontented on the desertion of his friends. Timothy, if ever exposed to the same sufferings himself, would not consider that it proceeded from human weakness, nor from being a disciple, nor because he was inferior to Paul, but that all this happened in the natural course of things. For if Paul endured these things, much more Timothy ought to be able to bear them.”

In this regard, the Lord had said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. If they have called the Master of the house ‘Beelzebub’, how much more will they call those of His household?” (Matthew 10:24)

Chrysostom added²¹⁶ that Timothy knew where the battle lines were drawn and that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12). Paul said to stand firm not to depress Timothy but to excite him.

“Be sober therefore, he means, and watch; have the Grace of the Lord cooperating with you, and aiding you in the contest; contribute your own part with much cheerfulness and resolution. When we go to watch a wrestling match today, we don’t go there in depression, but with excitement to root for our favorite contestant. In the same vein, we are all contestants in a larger wrestling match where the angels and saints are cheering for us.

Chrysostom concluded²¹⁷ with a very fitting example: a comparison of the Emperor Nero with the Apostle Paul, where it was Nero who had Paul beheaded. Even though Nero had all the power, he couldn’t stop Paul from proclaiming the Word. Nero had the entire honor from the world; Paul had none. Yet at the Second Coming of Christ, this situation will be reversed.

“Nero had the glory of this world; Paul had the dishonor of this world. Nero was a tyrant who had great success, many trophies, wealth overflowing, numerous armies, the greater part of the world in his sway, the Senate crouching to him and a splendid palace to live in. When he went out, he was arrayed in gold and precious

²¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IV, vv. 1-7.

²¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IV, vv. 1-7.

²¹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, IV, Moral.

stones and was surrounded by guards and attendants. When he sat down, he was clothed in robes of purple. He was called lord of land and sea, Emperor, King and other high-sounding names. Even wise men, potentates and sovereigns trembled at him for he was said to be a cruel and violent man. He wished to be thought of as a god, and he despised both all the idols and the very God Who is over all.”

“Now in opposition to him, let us consider Paul, a Cilician, a tent-maker, a poor man, unskilled in the wisdom of Rome, knowing the Hebrew language, which was especially despised by the Italians. He was a man that often lived in hunger, often went to bed without food, a man that didn’t have clothes to put on, often in cold and nakedness (2 Corinthians 11:27). Paul was cast into prison by Nero himself, confined with robbers, impostors, grave-robbers and murderers, and scourged as a malefactor. Yet (in the 4th Century), the greater part of the world had never heard of Nero while Paul is daily celebrated among Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians and those who inhabit the extremities of the earth. No one knows where Nero’s grave²¹⁸ is, while the tent-maker occupies the midst of the city²¹⁹ as if he were a king and living.”

“Yet let us consider what the case was when Paul was in chains, dragged bound from prison, while Nero was clothed in purple and walked out from a palace. Nero, with armies at his command, said, ‘Do not disseminate the Word of God!’ Paul said, ‘I cannot stop, the Word of God is not chained!’ (2 Timothy 2:9) Thus the Cilician, the prisoner, the poor tent-maker, who lived in hunger, despised the rich Roman emperor with all his armies. He that was in chains was a conqueror; he that was in a purple robe was conquered. A single man defeated the Emperor and his armies. The surrounding multitudes were all slaves of Nero, yet they admired not their lord but him who was superior to their lord.”

“And yet I am but praising the lion for his claws, when I ought to be speaking of his real honors. How will Paul come in shining garments with the King of Heaven? How will Nero stand then, mournful and dejected? Let us, my beloved children, be imitators of Paul, not in his faith only, but in his life, that we may attain to heavenly glory, and trample upon that glory that is here”.

Chrysostom also pointed out²²⁰ that as Christians we conquer not by doing wrongfully, but by suffering wrongfully. This is exactly the opposite from those who overreach, and the result is that the victory is shown to be of God and not of man.

“Let us not seek victory everywhere. He that has overreached has conquered the person wronged, but with an evil victory, and one that brings destruction to him that has won it. But he that is wronged, and seems to have been conquered, if he has born it with self-command, this above all is the one that has the crown. Often to be defeated is better, and this is the best mode of victory. Whether one overreaches, smites, or envies, he that is defeated, and enters not into the conflict, this is he who has the victory.”

²¹⁸ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>. When Nero was about to be overthrown, he committed suicide and was buried in the Mausoleum of the Domitii Ahenobarbi, in what is now the Villa Borghese (Pincian Hill) area of Rome.

²¹⁹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle. Paul’s gravesite was in the middle of the city of Rome at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

²²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXIV, 4.

“Similarly he that is dragged to martyrdom conquers by being bound, beaten, maimed and slain. What is in wars defeat, namely for the combatant to fall, this with us is victory. Nowhere do we overcome by doing wrongfully, but everywhere by suffering wrongfully. Thus the victory becomes more glorious, when we sufferers get the better of the doers. By this it is shown that the victory is of God. It has an opposite nature to outward conquest, which fact is an infallible sign of strength. Thus the rocks on the seashore, by being struck, break the waves; thus also all the saints were proclaimed, crowned, and set up their glorious trophies, winning this tranquil victory. ‘Don’t stir yourself’, He said, ‘don’t weary yourself. God has given you this might to conquer not by conflict, but by endurance alone. Don’t oppose yourself, and you have conquered; don’t fight, and you have gained the crown. Why do you disgrace yourself? Don’t allow him to say that by fighting you have got the better, but allow him to be amazed and to marvel at your invincible power; and to say to all, that even without entering into conflict you have conquered’”.

Suffering is a Result of the Fall of Adam

Where did suffering originate? The ultimate answer is that it originated in the Garden of Eden as a result of sin. Prior to that, there was no suffering; after that, there was suffering everywhere.

John Chrysostom noted²²¹ when suffering first originated: with Adam’s sin. Adam thought that he could become like God; to repel this thought, God made Adam subject to suffering and disease. It was a concept Adam couldn’t understand until he was allowed by God to suffer such evil. To illustrate clearly to Adam what he brought on himself, Adam got to watch his son Abel corrupting and decaying in death before he died himself.

“Notice what manner of body God formed us with at the first, in Paradise, and survey the Man that was created at the beginning. That body was not corruptible and mortal; but like some statue of gold just brought from the furnace, that shines splendidly; it was free from all corruption. Labor did not trouble it; sweat did not deface it. Cares did not conspire against it; nor sorrows besiege it; nor was there any other affection of that kind to distress it. But man did not bear his happiness with moderation, but threw contempt on his Benefactor, and thought a deceiving demon more worthy of credit than God who cared for him. God had raised him to honor, and when he expected to become himself a God, and conceived thoughts above his proper dignity, then God humbled him by decisive acts, and made him mortal as well as corruptible. He fettered him with varied necessities not from hatred or aversion, but in care for him, and to repress at the very outset that evil and destructive pride. Instead of permitting it to proceed any further, He admonished Him by actual experience, that he was mortal and corruptible. This was to convince him that he must never again think or dream of such things as he had done. The devil’s suggestion, was, ‘You shall be as gods’ (Genesis 3:5 LXX). God desired utterly to eradicate this idea; so He made the body subject to much suffering and disease, to instruct him by its very nature that he must never again entertain such a thought. That this is true is really most evident from what befell

²²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, XI, 3.

him; for after such an expectation, he was condemned to this punishment. Consider also with me the wisdom of God in this matter. God did not allow him to be the first to die, but permitted his son to suffer death first. Seeing before his eyes the body corrupting and decaying, he might receive a striking lesson of wisdom from that spectacle; Adam learned what had come to pass, and was duly chastened before he departed.”

Cyprian of Carthage, writing from exile to prisoners facing martyrdom, encouraged²²² them to look forward to their reward for confessing their Faith. This has happened to all the righteous since the beginning of the world and no one shall attain to His Kingdom but those who have followed Him in His own way.

“Don’t let anything be resolved in your hearts and minds besides the divine precepts and heavenly commands, with which the Holy Spirit has animated you to the endurance of suffering. Let no one think of death, but of immortality; not of temporary punishment, but of eternal glory; since it is written, ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints’ (Psalm 116:15). Again, ‘Sacrifice to God is a broken spirit: a broken and humbled heart God will not despise’ (Psalm 51:17 LXX). And again, the sacred Scripture²²³ speaks of the tortures which consecrate God’s martyrs, and sanctify them in the trial of suffering: ‘Though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of Himself; like gold in the furnace He tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering He accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever’ (Wisdom 3:4-8 LXX). When we reflect that we shall judge and reign with Christ the Lord, we need to exult and tread under foot present sufferings, in the joy of what is to come. We know that from the beginning of the world it has been so appointed that righteousness should suffer in the conflict of the world. Since in the beginning, even at the first, the righteous Abel was slain, and thereafter all righteous men, prophets, and apostles who were sent. To all of whom the Lord has appointed an example, teaching that none shall attain to His kingdom but those who have followed Him in His own way, saying, ‘He that loves his life in this world shall lose it; and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it for eternal life’” (John 12:25).

The Forgiveness of Our Sins

Suffering in this life can also work toward the forgiveness of our sins. John Chrysostom stated²²⁴ that we are not really injured by any of our sufferings. Unjust suffering (under which many illnesses fall) can either work toward forgiveness of our sins or toward greater rewards.

“Although there are many that injure, yet is there not so much as one that is injured. I mean, that what we may suffer unjustly from anyone, it tells either to the doing away of our sins, God so putting that wrong to our account; or to the recompense of rewards.”

²²² Cyprian of Carthage, Epistle to Sergius, Rogatianus, et al., LXXX, 2.

²²³ The Early Church used the Septuagint (Greek or LXX) translation of the Old Testament, which included what is now called the Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament.

²²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, IX, 2.

“Let us conduct our argument in the way of illustration. Suppose a certain servant who owes much money to his master; suppose also that this servant has been despitefully used by unjust men, and robbed of some of his goods. If then the master, in whose power it was to stop the plunderer, instead of restoring that same property, should reckon what was taken away towards what was owed him by his servant, is the servant then injured? By no means! But what if he should repay him even more? Has he not then even gained more than he has lost? Every one, I suppose, perceives this.”

“Now this same reckoning we can make in regard to our own sufferings. In consideration of what we may suffer wrongfully, we either have sins done away, or receive more glorious crowns, if the amount of our sins is not so great.”

Chrysostom also noted²²⁵ that sometimes we suffer so much that we draw out the mercy of God beyond what we might deserve. Examples are Jerusalem at the time of the Captivity for the positive and Elisha’s servant Gehazi for the negative.

“When you see a rich man plundering the poor, weep for the plunderer, not the one that is suffering wrong. The poor man gets rid of filth; the rich man smears himself with more filth. Such was the fate of Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, in the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5). Though he didn’t take by violence, yet he did a wrong; for to get money by deceit is a wrong. What happened then? With the wrong, Gehazi received also the leprosy; he that was wronged was benefited, but he that did the wrong received the greatest possible harm. The same happens now in the case of the soul. This is of so great force that often by itself it has propitiated God. Though he who suffers evil is unworthy of aid, yet when he suffers so much in excess, by this alone he draws God to the forgiveness of himself, and to the punishment of him that did the wrong. God had said of old to the heathen, ‘I am very angry with the heathen that combined to attack Jerusalem and Zion. I was a little angry with Jerusalem, but the heathen combined to attack *her* in such an evil way that I will return to Jerusalem with compassion’ (Zechariah 1:15-16 LXX); but the heathen shall suffer evils irremediable. There is nothing that so much exasperates God as plunder, violence and extortion.”

Chrysostom further stated²²⁶ that the faith versus works issue (James 2:26) comes down to a willingness to suffer for Christ’s sake. Then is when our Faith shines.

“Not through believing only cometh our salvation, but also through the suffering and enduring affliction. This is like a boxer, who is an object of admiration. When he does personal appearances, he has his skill within himself; but when he is in action, enduring blows and striking his adversary, then most of all he shines, because then his good training is put in action, and the proof of his skill is shown. So truly is our salvation then put in action, displayed, increased, heightened, when it has endurance, when it suffers and bears all things nobly. The work of salvation consists not in doing evil, but in suffering evil.”

Why Do Some Suffer and Others Don’t?

²²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIII, v. 12.

²²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, II, 1.

Many people might respond to suffering by saying, “Why me?” It interrupts our plans and would seem to conflict with our interpretation of the Scripture where Christ said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). Christ did not say that we will never suffer during our “abundant life”, as was shown from numerous quotes from the Scriptures earlier. Actually we all suffer, but we suffer in different ways. We just don’t call it “suffering” all the time; we only call it such when we experience a lot of pain and anguish.

John Chrysostom spoke²²⁷ about why some suffer while others don’t. When one suffers, God does not desert him; this is a process of correcting him, like the Paralytic who spent 38 years in his condition because of his sin (John 5:14). Chastening and suffering are useful for us if we bear it thankfully.

“If our openly acknowledged sins bring upon us inevitable chastisement, if we were to reckon up our secret sins, then we shall see especially that the providence of God does not bring upon us punishment for each sin. When we see anyone rapacious, covetous, and not chastened, we can unfold our own conscience; reckon up our own life, and go over the sins which we have committed. We shall learn rightly that in our own case first, it is not expedient to be chastened for each of our sins. Most people make reckless statements, since they do not look on their own case before that of others; we ignore our own case and examine everyone else. Let us no longer do this, but the reverse; if we see any righteous man chastened, remember Job. If anyone is righteous, he will not be more righteous than Job and he will not even be close. No matter how much he suffers, he will not suffer as much as that man.”

“Keeping this in mind, cease blaming the master; learn that God does not desert someone who suffers evil, but through a desire to crown him, He makes him more distinguished. If you see a sinner punished, remember the paralytic who spent 38 years on his bed. That that man was delivered over to that disease through sin; hear Christ say, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you’ (John 5:14). When we are chastened, we either pay the penalty of our sins, or else we receive the occasion of crowning if, when we live in rectitude, we suffer evil. Whether we live in righteousness, or in sins, chastening is a useful thing for us, sometimes making us more distinguished, sometimes rendering us more self-controlled, and lightening the punishment to come for us. That it is possible that one chastened here, and bearing it thankfully should experience milder punishment there Paul said, ‘For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world’” (1 Corinthians 11:30-32).

Chrysostom also addressed²²⁸ the case where an evil man is not punished while a good man suffers from poverty and disease. Some people accuse God of being unjust, which is blasphemy. God knows what He is doing; we need to trust Him in this.

“A certain man is rich, overbearing, rapacious and covetous; he drains the substance of the poor day by day, and suffers no terrible affliction. Another lives in forbearance, self-restraint, and uprightness, and is adorned with all other good

²²⁷ John Chrysostom, [Against Those Who Say that Demons Govern Human Affairs](#), I, 7-8.

²²⁸ John Chrysostom, [Against Those Who Say that Demons Govern Human Affairs](#), I, 7.

qualities; yet he is chastened with poverty, disease, and extremely terrible afflictions. Do these matters offend you? If we see the rapacious, the many chastened, and those living virtuously, some enjoying countless goods, why are we not content with the Almighty? It is this which offends me more. Why when there are two evil men, is one chastened, and another gets off; why when there are two good men, is one honored, and the other continues under punishment? This thing is a very great work of God's providence. If He were to chasten all the evil men here; and if He were to honor here all the good men, a day of judgment would be superfluous. If He were to chasten no wicked man, nor were to honor any of the good, then the base would become baser and worse, as being more careless than the excellent. Those who were minded to blaspheme would accuse God all the more, and say that our affairs were altogether deprived of his providence."

Basil the Great wrote²²⁹ to the Church in Alexandria during the persecution by the Arians. Basil was so perturbed that he wondered whether the last hours were coming and the appearing of the Antichrist was near. He encouraged the Alexandrians to persevere in the Faith, since this is what the saints of old did in these circumstances. The more we are allowed to suffer for Christ, the more blessed we are; our suffering is not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us.

"I have heard of the persecution in Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, and I am deeply affected. I have observed the ingenuity of the devil's mode of warfare. When he saw that the Church increased under the persecution of enemies and flourished all the more, he changed his plan. He no longer carries on an open warfare, but lays secret snares against us, hiding his hostility under the name which they bear, in order that we may suffer like our fathers. At the same time, we may seem not to suffer for Christ's sake, because our persecutors too bear the name of Christians. With these thoughts for a long time we sat still, dazed at the news of what had happened, for our ears tingled on hearing of the shameless and inhuman heresy of your persecutors. They have not revered age, services to society, or people's affection. They inflicted torture, disgrace, and exile; they plundered all the property they could find; they were careless alike of human condemnation and of the awful retribution to come at the hands of the righteous Judge. All this has amazed me and all but driven me out of my senses. To my reflections has been added this thought too; can the Lord have wholly abandoned His Churches? Has the last hour come, and is 'the falling away' thus coming upon us, that now the lawless one 'may be revealed the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped' (2 Timothy 2:4) If the temptation is for a season, bear it, you noble athletes of Christ. If the world is being delivered to complete and final destruction, let us not lose heart for the present, but let us await the revelation from heaven, and the revealing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. If all creation is to be dissolved, and the fashion of this world transformed, why should we be surprised that we, who are a part of creation, should feel the general woe. We will then be delivered to afflictions, which our just God inflicts on us according to the measure of our strength, not letting us '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) Brothers, martyrs' crowns

²²⁹ Basil the Great, Letter to the Alexandrians, 139, 1.

await you! The companies of the confessors are ready to reach out their hands to you and to welcome you into their own ranks. Remember how none of the saints of old won their crowns of patient endurance by living luxuriously; but all were tested by being put through the fire of great afflictions. ‘Others had trial of mocking and scourging. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were slain with the sword’ (Hebrews 11:36-37). These are the glories of saints. Blessed is he who is deemed worthy to suffer for Christ; more blessed is he whose sufferings are greater, since ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us’” (Romans 8:18).

Chrysostom pointed out²³⁰ some contrasts between Paul’s struggles and life in his own times (4th century). We do not have to put up with anything close to what Paul had to endure. We should keep this in mind when we have to put up with annoyances in our life, and also when we consider what luxuries we enjoy every day.

“Listen to Luke saying, ‘The Apostles returned from the presence of the council, rejoicing that, they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name’ (Acts 5:41). This is totally foreign to us! Both suffering shame and being put in prison is being ‘counted worthy’. He, who is in love, considers it gain to suffer anything for the sake of his loved one; much rather than it is so to suffer for the sake of Christ. We should not be dejected at our tribulations for Christ’s sake; let us remember Paul’s bonds, and let this be our incitement: Do you exhort any to give to the poor for Christ’s sake? Remind them of Paul’s bonds that he gave up even his body to bonds for His sake; but we will not give even a portion of our food? Are we proud of our good deeds? Remember Paul’s bonds that you have suffered nothing of that kind, and you will be proud no more. Do we covet any of the things that are our neighbor’s? Remember Paul’s bonds, and you will see how unreasonable it is, that while he was in peril, we should be enjoying ourselves. Is our heart set on self-indulgence? Picture in our minds Paul’s prison-house; we are his disciple, his fellow-soldier. How is it reasonable, that our fellow-soldier should be in bonds, and we in luxury? Are we in affliction? We should not consider ourselves forsaken. Hear of Paul’s bonds, and you will see that to be in affliction is no proof of being forsaken. Do we wear silk clothing? Remember Paul’s bonds; and these things will appear to us as worthless as the filthy rags. Do we array ourselves with golden trinkets? Picture in our minds Paul’s bonds, and these things will seem to us no better than a withered bulrush. Do we coif our hair in order to be beautiful to look at? Think of Paul’s squalidness within that prison-house, and we will long for that beauty, and consider this the extreme of ugliness.”

Practical Aspects of Suffering

So suffering can take many forms, and the Scriptures teach us that we will all suffer in some way. Let’s look at some of the details of this to see what is beneficial and what is not. There is a great benefit to suffering for Christ, and most suffering unjustly is in fact suffering for Christ if we are thankful for it. As Christians we all share in each other’s suffering; but we might ask just how we can suffer in a time of so-called peace when no one is persecuting the Church. Also we might ask when we are persecuted, how do we know when to run and when to stand and suffer?

²³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, XII, v. 18.

Suffering Unjustly

We may suffer unjustly in almost any situation: on the job, at home by the kids, in the community by neighbors, in sickness, as well as by adversaries to the Faith. The big question is how we handle it, however.

John Chrysostom spoke²³¹ about the effects of suffering; anyone who suffers anything and bears it nobly is akin to the martyrs. This is demonstrated by Job. Suffering in this life helps to do away with our sins also, as we see with the rich man and Lazarus. How we carry ourselves is more important than where we live; this is illustrated by the three youths in the furnace.

“He is well approved, who suffers in the cause of God. He who is suffering anything unjustly, and bearing it nobly, and giving thanks to God who permits it, is not inferior to him who sustains these trials for God’s sake. The blessed Job is a proof of this, who received so many intolerable wounds through the devil’s plotting against him uselessly, vainly, and without cause. Yet, nevertheless, because he bore them courageously, and gave thanks to God who permitted them, he was invested with a perfect crown.”

“If we suffer any evil unjustly, during the present life, we discharge a multitude of sins. Therefore it is a great advantage to have the chastisement of our sins here, and not there; for the rich man received no evil here, and therefore he was scorched in the flames there; that this was the reason why he did not enjoy any consolation, hear in proof what Abraham said. ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things; therefore you are tormented’. Regarding the good things bestowed on Lazarus, not only his virtue, but his having here suffered a thousand ills, contributed; we learn this also from the patriarch’s words. Having said to the rich man, ‘You have received your good things’, he goes on to say, ‘and likewise Lazarus evil things, and for this reason he is comforted’ (Luke 16:25). Those who live virtuously, and are afflicted, receive a double reward from God; so he who lives in wickedness, and fares sumptuously, shall have a double punishment.”

“Let us again call to mind those three youths, who were in the midst of the furnace, yet suffered no evil; and those who cast them into it, how they that sat around were all consumed (Daniel 3:20-25). What is more wonderful than this? The fire freed those it held possession of, and violently seized those whom it did not hold; this teaches us that not the habitation, but the habit of life, brings safety or punishment. Those inside the furnace escaped, but those outside were consumed. Each had the same kind of bodies, but not the same dispositions. For this reason neither were the effects on them the same. Hay, although it lies outside the flame, is quickly kindled; but gold, although it remains inside, becomes more resplendent!”

Chrysostom also encouraged²³² us to be kind to our enemies, like the Twelve Apostles who welcomed 3000 converts from among the people who had crucified Christ seven weeks earlier. If we learn to feel for the evils our neighbors suffer, we shall learn to endure the evils they inflict.

²³¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues, VI, 9-10.

²³² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, v. 34.

“Let us be kind to our enemies, even those who have given us numberless pains. Whatever good thing we may have, let us give to them; let us not pass them by in our acts of beneficence. If we sate their rage by suffering evil, much more by doing them good; for this is not as hard as suffering evil. It is not the same to do good to an enemy, and to be willing to suffer greater wrongs than he wishes to inflict; but from the one we shall come on to the other. This is the dignity of Christ’s disciples. Those crucified Him, when He had come for the very purpose of doing them good. His disciples they scourged; and after all this, He admits them to the same honor with His disciples, making them equally partakers of His gifts (Acts 2:36-40). I beseech you, let us be imitators of Christ; in this regard it is possible to imitate Him. This makes a man like God; this is more than human. Let us hold fast to Mercy; she is the schoolmistress and teacher of that higher Wisdom. He that has learned to show mercy to the distressed will learn also not to resent injuries; he that has learned this will be able to do good even to his enemies. Let us learn to feel for the evils our neighbors suffer, and we shall learn to endure the evils they inflict.”

Chrysostom further pointed out²³³ that the nature of victory is in suffering evil with long-suffering; it is not at all like the competition in the heathen games.

“God has commanded us when punched out not only to endure it, but even to offer ourselves to suffer something worse. We resist God with such vehemence, that we not only refuse to offer ourselves to suffer evil, but even avenge ourselves; often we are the first to act on the offensive, and think we are disgraced if we do not respond to evil with more evil in return. The mischief is that when we are utterly beaten by refusing to suffer evil, we think ourselves conquerors; when receiving ten thousand blows from the devil, then we imagine that we are mastering him. I exhort you to understand what the nature of this victory is; let us follow after this kind of nature. To suffer evil is to get the crown. If then we wish to be proclaimed victors by God, let us not in these contests observe the laws of heathen games, but those of God, and learn to bear all things with long-suffering. This is the only way to get the better of our antagonists, and obtain both present and promised rewards.”

In addition Chrysostom described²³⁴ the practical effects of returning good for evil. We end up taking vengeance on our enemies indirectly, when others see us being kind and turn to criticize our enemies. Even dogs reverence a man who is willing to suffer evil from them! This is why Christ told us to turn the other cheek.

“If you wish to take vengeance, do it in this manner. Return good for evil, that you may achieve a glorious victory. If you go about resenting someone’s evil, everyone will blame both you and him alike. But if you endure it patiently, it will be the opposite. You will be applauded and admired; but him they will criticize. What greater punishment can there be to an enemy, than to behold his enemy admired and applauded by all men? What is bitterer to an enemy, than to see himself criticized by everyone before his enemy’s face? If you avenge him, you will both be condemned; whereas, if you forgive him, everyone will be avengers in

²³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IV, 4.

²³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XVI, Moral.

your place. This will be far more severe than any evil he can suffer, that his enemy should have so many to avenge him. If you open your mouth, they will be silent; but if you are silent, you are more avenged. If you criticize him, many will imply that your words are those of passion; but when others who have suffered no wrong from him overwhelm him with criticism, the revenge is especially clear of all suspicion. When they who have suffered no evil, feel and sympathize with you, as though they had been wronged themselves, this is a vengeance clear of all suspicion. ‘But what then’, you will say, ‘if no man should take vengeance?’ It cannot be that men will be such stones, as to behold such wisdom and not admire it. Even if they don’t take their vengeance on him at the time; still, afterwards, when they are in the mood, they will do so, and they will continue to scoff at him and abuse him. If no one else admires you, the man himself will most surely admire you, though he may not admit it. Why do you suppose that our Lord Christ said, ‘Whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also?’ (Matthew 5:39) Is it not because the more long-suffering a man is, the more significant the benefit he confers both on himself and on the other? For this cause He charges us to ‘turn the other also’, to satisfy the desire of the enraged. Who is such a monster as not to be put to shame by this? Even dogs are said to feel this; if they bark and attack a man, and he throws himself on his back and does nothing, he puts a stop to their entire wrath. If they reverence the man who is ready to suffer evil from them, much more will the race of man do so, since humans are more rational than dogs.”

Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, stated²³⁵ that patience and perseverance is essential for the Bishops in their watch over their flock. Active persecution should not stop him; nor should other persecution due to his nonconformity to worldly expectations.

“The Lord says, ‘He who endures to the end shall be saved’ (Matthew 24:13); where shall this blessed perseverance come from, except from the strength of patience? As Paul proclaims, ‘All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). It is not only reckoned persecution, when sword, fire or other active means are used against the Christian Faith. The direst persecution is often inflicted by nonconformity of practice and persistent disobedience and the barbs of ill-natured tongues. All the members of the Church are always liable to these attacks, and no portion of the faithful are free from temptation. Neither a life of ease nor a life of labor is devoid of danger. Who shall guide the ship amidst the waves of the sea, if the helmsman quits his post? Who shall guard the sheep from the treachery of wolves, if the shepherd himself is not on the watch? Who shall resist the thieves and robbers, if love of quiet draws away the watchman that is set to keep the outlook in the strictness of his watch? One must abide, therefore, in the office committed to him and in the task undertaken.”

A Great Good Results

The rewards we obtain for suffering for Christ are not mentioned much in most Churches, probably because persecution is not an obvious factor. Persecution is raging but we often don’t recognize it. It doesn’t affect us immediately and personally (so we think), so we just go blithely on afraid to speak out for fear of being persecuted. The rewards for suffering for Christ are huge, but they may not be spelled out in detail!

²³⁵ Leo the Great, Letter to Rusticus, 167, 2.

Cyprian of Carthage stated²³⁶ that we receive much more as the reward of our suffering than what we endure in the suffering itself. In order to understand this, one has to see things from the viewpoint of Paul and others who have gotten a glimpse of Paradise. By suffering, we enter Paradise, where Adam once lived; by refusing to be bullied by demons, we conquer him who had conquered Adam in Paradise.

“Paul testifies that he heard unspeakable words that he saw Jesus Christ by the faith of sight, and says: ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us’ (Romans 8:18). Who, then, does not with all his powers labor to attain to such a glory that he may become the friend of God, that he may at once rejoice with Christ, that after earthly tortures and punishments he may receive divine rewards? Soldiers of this world find it glorious to return in triumph to their country when the foe is vanquished. How much more excellent and greater is the glory, when the devil is overcome, to return in triumph to paradise, and to bring back victorious trophies to that place from which Adam was ejected as a sinner, after casting down him who formerly had cast Adam down. We offer to God the most acceptable gift -- an uncorrupted faith. We accompany Him when He comes to receive vengeance on His enemies, to stand at His side when He shall sit to judge, to become co-heir of Christ, to be made equal to the angels. What persecution can conquer, what tortures can overcome such thoughts as these? The brave and steadfast mind endures unmoved against all the terrors of the devil and the threats of the world, when it is strengthened by the sure and solid faith of things to come. In persecutions, earth is shut up, but heaven is opened; Antichrist is threatening, but Christ is protecting; death is brought in, but immortality follows; the world is taken away from him that is slain, but paradise is set forth to him restored; the life of time is extinguished, but the life of eternity is realized. What a dignity it is, and what a security, to go gladly from here, to depart gloriously in the midst of afflictions and tribulations. In a moment we close the eyes with which men and the world are looked upon, and at once we open them to look on God and Christ! Of such a blessed departure how great is the swiftness! You shall be suddenly taken away from earth, to be placed in the heavenly kingdoms. It behooves us to embrace these things in our mind and consideration, to meditate on these things day and night.”

John Chrysostom pointed out²³⁷ the effects of us returning kindness to those that cause us to suffer. Everyone acknowledges us as the better person and we rid ourselves of trouble. We also put off our sins as the Publican did by meekly bearing the Pharisee’s accusations. By doing so, we receive a double crown: one for the evil we suffer and one for the good we do.

“This is the truest wonder that we are so far from being injured, if we are right-minded, that we are even benefited, by the very things that we suffer unjustly at the hands of others. Reflect then; has someone insulted us? We have the power of making this insult redound to our honor. If we insult in return, we only increase the disgrace. But if we bless him that insulted us, we will see that all men acknowledge us, and proclaim our praise. Notice how by the things wherein we are wronged, we get good done to us if we are so minded? This one may see

²³⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, XI, 13.

²³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XII, v. 13.

happening in the case of money matters, of beatings, and the same in everything else. If we repay them with the opposite, we are but twining a double crown about us, one for the evils we have suffered, as well as one for the good we are doing. Whenever then a person comes and tells us that ‘such a one has insulted us, and keeps continually speaking evil of us to everybody, praise the man to those who tell us of him. For thus even if we wish to avenge ourselves, we will have the power of inflicting punishment. Those who hear us, even if they ever so foolish, will praise us, and hate him as fiercer than any brute beast, because he, without being at all wronged, caused us pain, but we, even when suffering wrong, repaid him with the opposite. So we will have it in our power to prove that all that he said was to no purpose. He who feels the tooth of slander, gives by his vexation a proof that he is conscious of the truth of what is said. But he who smiles at it, by doing this acquits himself of all suspicion with those who are present. Consider how many good things we cull together from this. First, we rid ourselves of all vexation and trouble. Secondly (rather this should come first), even if we have sins, we put them off, as the Publican did by bearing the Pharisee’s accusation meekly. Besides, we will by this practice make our soul heroic, we will enjoy endless praises from all men, and we will divest yourself of any suspicion arising from what is said. But even if we are desirous of taking revenge on the man, this too will follow in full measure, both by God’s punishing him for what he has said, and before that punishment by our heroic conduct taking the place of a mortal blow. There is nothing that cuts those who insult us so much to the heart, as for we who are insulted to smile at the insult.”

John of Damascus summarized²³⁸ the workings of God according to His good-will and according to what He permits. Sometimes our sufferings have far-reaching consequences that we wouldn’t have dreamed of. Other times our sufferings are intended to correct some fault, such as pride. In most cases, the choice of what is to be done is in our own hands.

“The works of the Providence of God are partly according to the good-will (of God) and partly according to permission. Works of good-will include all those that are undeniably good, while works of permission have many forms of concession. Providence often permits the just man to encounter misfortune in order that he may reveal to others the virtue that lies concealed within him, as was the case with Job (Job 1:9-12). At other times it allows something strange to be done in order that something great and marvelous might be accomplished through the seemingly-strange act, as when the salvation of men was brought about through the Cross. In another way it allows the pious man to suffer terrible trials in order that he may not depart from a right conscience or lapse into pride on account of the power and grace granted to him, as was the case with Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7).”

“One man is forsaken for a season with a view to another’s restoration, in order that others when they see his state may be taught a lesson, as in the case of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-21). Our nature tends to be downcast when we see persons in distress. Another is deserted by Providence in order that another may be glorified, and not for his own sin or that of his parents, just as the man who was blind from his birth ministered to the glory of the Son of Man (John 9:1-3). Again another is permitted to suffer in order to stir up the hearts of others to do the

²³⁸ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Christian Faith, II, 29.

same, so that others by magnifying the glory of the sufferer may resolutely welcome suffering in the hope of future glory and the desire for future blessings, as in the case of the martyrs. Another is allowed to fall at times into some act of baseness in order that another worse fault may be thus corrected. For instance God may allow a man who takes pride in his virtue and righteousness to fall away into fornication in order that he may be brought through this fall to the perception of his own weakness and be humbled, approach and make confession to the Lord.”

“Moreover, the choice of what is to be done is in our own hands. But the final issue depends, in the one case when our actions are good, on the cooperation of God, Who in His justice brings help according to His foreknowledge to such as choose the good with a right conscience. In the other case when our actions are to evil, God desert us, Who again in His justice stands aloof in accordance with His foreknowledge.”

Chrysostom stated²³⁹ that we can suffer for the King of the universe many times every day; and we receive a reward every time it happens. People did this also under the Old Covenant but the rewards were not as great.

“It is not for men, nor for any other of the things of this life that we suffer, but for the King of the universe. This is not the only crown, for Paul encircles them with another besides, varied and manifold. Since they were men they could not have deaths without number to undergo; he shows that in this way the prize is none the less. For even if by nature it were fated to die once, by choice God has granted us to suffer this every day, if we are so minded. Therefore it is plain that we shall depart with as many crowns as we have lived days, or rather with many more. For it is possible in a day to die not once alone or twice, but many times. He who is always ready for this, keeps continually receiving a full reward. This is what the Psalmist hints at, when he says, ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’ (Psalm 44:22). For this reason Paul brought the Psalmist before them to rouse them up the more. If those in the old dispensation, who had the land as their reward, and the other things which come to a close along with this life, did so look down upon the present life and the temptations and dangers of it, what pardon should we find if we deal so languidly after the promise of Heaven, the Kingdom above, and its unutterable blessings, so as not to come even up to the same measure as they?”

Christians Share in Each Other’s Suffering

As members of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12), we have Christ as our head (Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 1:18, 2:19) and many other Christians as our brothers and sisters. Paul worked very hard on behalf of his fellow Christians, even though they did not know as much as he did about the Christian Faith. The heathen thought Paul was a fool to be willing to do all this for someone else besides himself. As we show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, the love of God is revealed and the demons, who try to hinder us, are overthrown. We should undertake this work together joyfully since there are great rewards in store for us if we do it faithfully.

²³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XV, v. 36.

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁴⁰ the labor of love of the Thessalonians. Because they believed, they were willing to suffer all things; their Faith was shown through their works. In this, the labor of love was difficult and it exposed the Thessalonians to great danger.

Because no one among men was praising their actions, no one giving them any reward, Paul says this, ‘You labor in the sight of our God’. What is ‘the work of faith? (1 Thessalonians 1:3)’. Nothing has turned aside their steadfastness; this is the work of faith! If you believe, suffer all things; if you do not suffer, you do not believe. Are not the things promised such that he who believes would choose to suffer even ten thousand deaths? The kingdom of heaven is set before him, plus immortality and eternal life. He therefore who believes will suffer all things. Faith then is shown through his works (James 2:24-26). Justly one might have said, not merely did you believe, but through your works you demonstrated it, through your steadfastness, through your zeal.

Paul also referred to a ‘labor of love’ (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Why? What labor is it to love? Merely to love is no labor at all. But to love genuinely is great labor. When a thousand things are stirred up that would draw us from love, and we hold out against them all, is that not labor? What did not these men suffer, that they might maintain their love? Those that warred against the Preaching went to Paul’s host, and not having found Paul, dragged Jason before the rulers of the city (Acts 17:5-6). Is this a slight labor, when the seed had not yet taken root, to endure so great a storm and so many trials? They demanded security of Jason. Having given security, Jason sent Paul away. Is this a small thing, tell me? Did not Jason expose himself to danger for Paul? This Paul calls a labor of love, because they were thus bound to him.

Paul stated, “Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world” (1 Corinthians 4:12-13). John Chrysostom stated²⁴¹ that when Paul was speaking about the care that Christ offers, he described the Cross in his own life. The heathen referred to Paul as a fool because he was willing to suffer for others.

“The meaning of ‘fools for Christ’s sake’ (1 Corinthians 4:10) is someone who suffers wrong and doesn’t avenge himself or get angry; thus he is reckoned a fool by the heathen, and they consider him dishonorable and weak. Paul did not speak distastefully by referring the sufferings he was speaking of to their city; but what did he say? ‘We are made the filth’, not ‘of your city’, but, ‘of the world’. Again, we are ‘the off-scouring of all things until now’ (1 Corinthians 4:13); not of you alone, but of everything. When he is speaking of the providential care of Christ, the Cross is what he brings forward. When he desires to attract them to himself, he doesn’t speak of all his miracles, he speaks of his sufferings on their account. This is our method also; when we are injured and despised by anyone, whatever we have endured for them, we bring the same forward.”

“‘The off-scouring of all things until now’ is a vigorous blow which he gave at the end, not of the persecutors only, but of those also for whom we suffer these things. Greatly are we obliged to them! It is the expression of one seriously concerned; not in pain himself, but desiring to make them feel that he who has any complaints to make should keep the Apostles in mind. And therefore Christ

²⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Thessalonians, I, vv. 1-3.

²⁴¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XIII, 2.

commanded us to bear insults meekly that we might both maintain a high strain of virtue, and put others to shame. One produces that effect not so well by reproach as by silence.”

Chrysostom further stated²⁴² that as we suffer patiently through everything the demons throw at us, the Devil is overthrown and injured. This occurred in the case of Job, where God even taunted Satan () on how powerless he was against Job. Chrysostom pointed out how a similar thing occurred with the Apostle Paul.

“The Church’s trophy and a brilliant victory occur when the Devil is overthrown as we suffer injury. When we suffer, he is taken captive; he suffers harm when he tries to inflict it on us. This happened in Paul’s case also; and the more the Devil plied him with perils, the more was he defeated. He didn’t raise up against him only one kind of trial, but various and diverse. Some involved labor, others sorrow, others fear, others pain, others care, others shame, others all these at once; but yet Paul was victorious in all. Like a single soldier, having the whole world fighting against him, he moved through the ranks of his enemies, and suffered no harm. Paul did this, showing himself singly, among barbarians, among Greeks, on land and on sea, remaining unconquered. Like a spark falling on dry reeds and hay, he kindled all he touched; he made all things change over to the truth; like a winter torrent, sweeping over all things and overturning every obstacle. Like some champion who wrestles, runs and boxes; or a soldier engaged in storming, fighting on foot, and on shipboard; so Paul tried every form of fight, breathing out fire, and was unapproachable by all. With his single body he took possession of the world; with his single tongue he put all to flight. Not with such force did those many trumpets fall on the stones of Jericho (Joshua) and throw them down; Paul’s voice both dashed to the earth the devil’s strong-holds and brought over to himself those that were against him.”

Chrysostom also noted²⁴³ that suffering for Christ should be undertaken joyfully, no matter what we do. This will be easier when we consider the benefit of doing so.

“When we suffer anything for Christ’s sake, let us not just bear it nobly but also rejoice. If we fast, let us leap for joy as if we are enjoying luxury; if we are insulted, let us dance as if we are praised; if we spend, let us feel as if we are gaining; if we give to the poor, let us count ourselves as if we receive. He that doesn’t give like this will not give readily. When we have a mind to scatter abroad, don’t consider only almsgiving, but also every kind of virtue. Compute not only the severity of the work, but also the sweetness of the prizes; and before all the subjects of this wrestling, our Lord Jesus. Then we will readily enter the contest, and will live the whole time in pleasure. Nothing tends to cause pleasure as a good conscience.”

How We Achieve Martyrdom in a Time of Peace

If martyrdom is a blessing and brings a huge reward, does this mean that these rewards are not available during times of peace? Times of peace can produce worse persecution than times of

²⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXV, vv. 31-32.

²⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XII, 5.

war against the Faith. There will always be conflict and torture against the Faith, but its form may change and the soul may be under attack as well as the body. Everyone who helps and contributes is worthy of a reward; not just the ones who are killed for the Faith. As the Body of Christ works in harmony serving her Lord, the demons get angry and work to try to stop us.

John Chrysostom stated²⁴⁴ that the times of peace are the times of the worst persecution, since it induces sleep into the soul. Instead of persecution by men, we are persecuted by the demons. Our passions, like wild beasts, attack us on every side. We think that we are at peace, not war; so that we do not even arm ourselves against it; no one fears, no one trembles. During times of persecution, few of these passions are able to disturb us because we are in fear all the time and on guard.

“Paul said, ‘All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’ (2 Timothy 3:12). They that live godly are always undergoing persecution, if not from men, at any rate from evil spirits, which is a more grievous persecution. Yes, first and foremost, it is as a result of ease and comfort, that those who are not vigilant undergo this. Do you think it is a trifling persecution to be living at ease? This is more tougher than all other kinds of persecution. Like an open wound, ease makes the soul languid; like the contrast between summer and winter, so is persecution and ease. To show you that this is the worse persecution, listen; it induces sleep in the soul, an excessive yawning and drowsiness, it stirs up the passions on every side, it arms pride, it arms pleasure, it arms anger, envy, vainglory, jealousy. But in time of persecution none of these is able to make a disturbance; fear enters in and plies the lash vigorously, as one does to a barking dog, and will not let any of these passions so much as attempt to give tongue. Who shall be able in time of persecution to indulge in vainglory? Who to live in pleasure? Not one; but there is much trembling and fear, making a great calm, composing the harbor into stillness, filling the soul with awe. I have heard from our fathers that in the persecution of old time, one might see men that were indeed Christian. None of them cared for money, none for wife, none for children, or home, or country; the one great concern with all was to save their souls. They were hiding, some in tombs and sepulchers, some in deserts; yes tender and dainty women too, fighting all the while with constant hunger. Then think whether any longing for sumptuous and dainty living at all came into the mind of a woman, while in hiding beside a coffin. Waiting for her maidservant to bring her meal, trembling lest she should be taken, lying in her terror as in a furnace; was she even aware that there was such a thing as dainty living that such things as dress and ornaments exist at all? Do you see that now in a time of peace is the persecution, with our passions, like wild beasts, attacking on us on every side? Now is the trying persecution, both in this regard, and especially if it is not even thought to be persecution at all. For this persecution has another evil in it, that being war, it is thought to be peace; so that we do not even arm ourselves against it; no one fears, no one trembles. But if you do not believe me, ask the heathen, the persecutors, at what time was the conduct of the Christians stricter, at what time were they all more proven? Few had they become then in number, but they were rich in virtue.”

²⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXIV, 44-46.

John Chrysostom asked²⁴⁵ how the Lord's words about suffering applied to times of peace when there is no open persecution. There will always be conflict and torture, but its form changes in times of peace. Things done in "passion" are sufferings, and they are present all the time. He that gets angry suffers; he wounds and bruises the soul. But he who is not angry does not suffer.

"What if there is no persecution? Make your stand against glory, and should anyone speak anything against you, don't fear to be evil spoken of for Christ's sake. Make your stand against the tyranny of pride, against the fighting of anger, against the torment of lust. These also are torments. What is the worst of tortures? Is it not that the soul is pained and is on fire? On the soul alone comes all the smart when one is angry, when one is envious, whatever else of this kind one suffers. It is not action, but passion; not a doing, but a suffering: to be angered, to feel envy. Therefore indeed they are called passions (or sufferings) of the soul, wounds and bruises. It is worse than suffering! You that are angry, do you think that you do such things in 'passion', in a state of suffering? Therefore he who is not angry does not suffer. Notice that not he who is abused is the sufferer, but he that abuses. That he is a sufferer is plain in the first place from the very fact that such a thing is called by this name of passion."

"'But he insulted my boy', you say; 'he called him a clown'. Don't think it is weakness if you don't do the same thing yourself. I know what passions are engendered in such cases. 'But', you say, 'what do I do if he despises me, what if he says it again?' Show him that he is in the wrong; rebuke him, entreat him; by meekness anger is put down. In cases of wrong done to ourselves it is right not to do even this, yet it is quite necessary to do it in behalf of others. Do not look on it as an insult to yourself that your boy has been insulted, annoyed though you may be for his sake. It does not follow because your boy has been ill-treated, that you are disgraced, but he is disgraced that did the evil. Quench that sharp sword of your anger; let it lie in its scabbard. If we have it unsheathed, we shall be apt to use it even when the time is not proper. Christ would not have us be angry on his account."

Cyprian of Carthage pointed out²⁴⁶ that those who teach the true Faith are worthy of the same rewards as those who suffer martyrdom.

"The Lord will reward you for that love of yours, and will restore to you the fruit due to this so good work. He who exhorts is not less worthy of the reward of the crown than he who suffers; not less worthy of praise is he who has taught, than he who has acted also. He is not less to be honored who has warned, than he who has fought; except sometimes the weight of glory overflows more to him who trains, than to him who has shown himself a teachable learner. The learner, perchance, would not have had what he has practiced, unless the teacher had taught him."

John Chrysostom stated²⁴⁷ that when we perform good deeds in Christ's Name, it is like we are goading the demons. We can expect them to respond in some way. To continue to do this when we have been struck by some demon-orchestrated calamity is to truly do it for God's sake.

²⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XV, v. 8.

²⁴⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle to Moyses, Maximus, et al*, XXV, 1.

²⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, XLIII, 6.

“Men do not provoke that evil monster the devil to wrath by small achievements. When we see a righteous man performing great and excellent deeds, yet suffering innumerable ills, don’t marvel. On the contrary, one might well marvel if the devil were to receive so many blows yet keep quiet and bear the wounds meekly. Similarly we shouldn’t be surprised if a serpent were continually goaded and spring on the person that goaded it. No serpent steals on us so fiercely as the devil, leaping up against everyone, like a scorpion with its stinger raised. We shouldn’t let this disturb us, since he that returns from war and slaughter will be bloody, and will often have received wounds. When we see anyone doing alms and performing numberless other good works and so curtailing the power of the devil, and then falling into temptations and perils; don’t be troubled by this. This is the reason why Paul fell into temptations, because he mightily smote the devil.”

“Why did God permit it?” we might say. That he might be crowned more signally; that the devil might receive a more severe wound. When a man suffers after benefits are conferred, and yet continually gives thanks, it is a blow to the devil. It is a great thing, even when our affairs are flowing on prosperously, to show mercy and to adhere to virtue; but it is far greater in grievous calamity to continue this noble occupation; this is he who may be most truly said to do so for God’s sake. So then, though we are in peril, though we suffer ever so greatly, let us with the greater zeal apply ourselves to our labors for virtue’s sake.”

How Do We Know When to Run and When to Suffer?

If we are faced with persecution, should we stand and face it so that we won’t be tempted to deny Christ, or should we leave and flee? The Scriptures present a contrast at different times. This leads to the question of what we should do. The Scriptures don’t present a clear cut-and-dried answer, but it seems to say that we need to be aware of the Will of God at all times. For example Paul fled when he was facing persecution and death in Damascus (Acts 9:23-26) and in Iconium (Acts 14:5-6). But when he came to Jerusalem after his 3rd Missionary Journey, he knew it was the Will of God to face the angry Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14).

Flee Persecution		Face Persecution	
Jesus said, “Flee”	Matthew 10:23	Jesus headed for persecution	Luke 9:51
Jesus fled Nazareth	Luke 4:29-31, John 8:59	Jesus didn’t flee the Cross	Matthew 26:39-42
Paul fled Damascus	Acts 9:24-26	Paul refused to flee Jews	Acts 21:10-14
Peter fled Jerusalem	Acts 12:3-17		
Paul fled Iconium	Acts 14:6		
Flee during the end times	Matthew 24:15-26		

Tertullian of Carthage presents²⁴⁸ a dramatic contrast between standing and suffering versus fleeing to avoid persecution. He notes that fleeing demonstrates a lack of Faith, a denying of Christ and is the portion of the outcast at the Last Judgment. Tertullian admits that the Scriptures present these things in a rather stark and harsh manner.

“Do our Lord’s ordinances agree that we should always flee persecution? In the first place, if persecution is from God, what are we to think of our being ordered by the party who brings it on us to take ourselves out of its way? If He

²⁴⁸ Tertullian of Carthage, *De Fuga in Persecution*, IV, ix, 7.

wanted it to be evaded, He had better not have sent it, that there might not be the appearance of His will being thwarted by another will.”

“Sometimes He asks us to suffer persecution; sometimes He asks us to flee from it. If to flee, how do we suffer? If to suffer, why do we flee? In fact, what utter inconsistency in the decrees of One who commands to flee, and yet urges us to suffer, which is the very opposite! ‘Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 10:32). How will he confess, fleeing? How will he flee, confessing? ‘Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father’s, and of the holy angels’ (Luke 9:26). If I avoid suffering, I am ashamed to confess. ‘Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake’ (Matthew 5:11). Unhappy, therefore, are they who, by running away, will not suffer according to the divine command. ‘He who endures to the end will be saved’ (Matthew 10:22). How then, when you ask me to flee, do you wish me to endure to the end? If views so opposed to each other do not correspond with the divine dignity, they clearly prove that the command to flee had, at the time it was given, a reason of its own. We are not to fear our persecutors. ‘Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ (Matthew 10:28). What does He allot to the fearful? ‘He who values his life more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me’ (Matthew 10:37-38 loosely). Last of all, He does not propose flight to the ‘cowardly’, but a miserable portion among the rest of the outcast, in the lake of brimstone and fire, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).

“These things may seem harsh and impossible to endure; but recall that God has said, ‘He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*’ (Matthew 19:12); that is, let him who does not receive it go his way. He, who fears to suffer, cannot belong to Him who suffered. But the man who does not fear to suffer, he will be perfect in love – that is, in the love of God. ‘There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love’ (1 John 4:18). ‘And therefore many are called, but few are chosen’ (Matthew 22:14). It is not asked who is ready to follow the broad way, but who the narrow. ‘Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it’ (Matthew 7:13-14). Therefore the Comforter is required, who guides us into all truth (John 16:13), and animates to all endurance. Those who have received Him will neither stoop to flee from persecution nor pay to avoid it. They have the Lord Himself, One who will stand by us to aid us in suffering, as well as to be our mouth when we are put to the question.”

Tertullian pointed out²⁴⁹ that there was a time when the Apostles were traveling all over the earth, when they had to flee persecution or the Gospel message would not get proclaimed. We can experience similar conditions when we have important work to do; this doesn’t negate to command to confess Christ before men.

²⁴⁹ Tertullian of Carthage, De Fuga in Persecution, IV, ix, 5-6.

“If you are not willing to confess, you are not willing to suffer; and to be unwilling to confess is to deny. But if this is wholly in God’s hand, why do we not leave it to His will? We recognize His might and power; just as He can bring us back to trial when we flee, so He can screen us when we do not flee.”

“He commanded the Apostles to flee for a time -- not with the object of eluding danger, which is what persecution would suggest. Rather He was in the habit of proclaiming that they would suffer persecution and that these must be endured. In order to further the proclamation of the Gospel message, the diffusion of the Gospel might be prevented if all the Apostles were killed at once.”

Let us consider two well-known examples of flight by people who are considered saints today: Gregory the Theologian²⁵⁰ and Athanasius of Alexandria.

Gregory the Theologian made a significant impact in the Church regarding Trinitarian theology during the days that the Arian heresy was prevalent. [The Arians claimed that Jesus was not really God.] Yet at the age of 32, when Gregory was ordained a priest by his father against his will, Gregory fled from his flock to live an ascetic life with Basil the Great. About a year later, Basil convinced Gregory to return to help his father, where his father really needed him. Gregory later gave an oration in which called his actions “cowardice”. He had wanted to escape from the world of human affairs and concentrate on the things of God. He went on to describe the obligations and dignity of the priestly office that has been drawn on by all later writers on the subject. Thus Gregory repented of his flight and went on to contribute greatly to the Early Church.

Athanasius of Alexandria was a pivotal figure at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD during the arguments on the correct interpretation of the Scriptures regarding the Deity of Christ. The arguments by Athanasius were so strong and convincing that the Arians were thoroughly embarrassed; they secretly vowed vengeance against Athanasius and the others. By 330 AD the Arians had gotten rid of a number of their “enemies” (i.e. those that spoke the truth) from the Council of Nicaea. Athanasius himself was able to outwit the Arians on a number of occasions. When Athanasius was on trial by the Arians, Athanasius showed dramatically that their accusations were fraud. Embarrassed, the Arians proceeded to raise a huge uproar in the courtroom and tried to tear Athanasius apart to murder him. Some nearby soldiers managed to drag Athanasius away and get him out of town.

This campaign of intrigue went on for most of Athanasius’ life. He was exiled five times, but kept in contact with his flock in Alexandria with letters and other written documents. His justification to hiding rather than standing, facing his slanderers, and letting them murder him, was that his flock needed him alive to testify to the extent of the evil generated by the Arians. In retrospect, from the writings of Athanasius as he was hounded from place to place, it was the will of God that Athanasius should be persecuted all his life to demonstrate what the character of the Arians was really like.

The Kiss of Peace

²⁵⁰ Gregory the Theologian or Gregory Nazianzen is considered a saint in both the East and the West. In the Roman Catholic Church, he is numbered as one of the “Doctors of the Church”. In the Orthodox Church, he is referred to as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs along with Basil the Great and John Chrysostom. He is also honored in the Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Church.

Peter concluded his Epistle with, “Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:14). Even as Peter wrote these words, “the Kiss of Peace” was a liturgical term. At one point during the early Christian worship, the people assembled in the Church greeted each other with a warm embrace – men with men, women with women. This had a practical effect in that it was difficult to be angry at someone if you gave them a warm embrace frequently.

Justin Martyr (mid-2nd century), addressed an Apology of the Christian Faith to Emperor Antoninus Pius²⁵¹ and the Roman Senate, where he described²⁵² the Christian Liturgy as centered on the Eucharist. Prior to the Eucharist, the members of the Church greeted each other with a kiss.

“After we have washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, we bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place. Having been counted worthy and having learned the truth, by our works we also are good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. The president of the brethren is then brought bread and a cup of wine mixed with water. He takes them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying ‘Amen’. This word ‘Amen’ answers in the Hebrew language to ‘so be it’. When the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their assent, those who are called deacons give to each of those present of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced; and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.”

Cyril of Jerusalem described²⁵³ the purpose of the Kiss of Peace: reconciliation between members of the Church. Peter and Paul refer to this Kiss of Peace also in their Epistles.

“Then the Deacon cries ‘Receive one another; and let us kiss one another’. Do not think that this kiss is of the same character with those given in public by common friends. It is not such; this kiss blends souls one with another, and courts entire forgiveness for them. The kiss therefore is the sign that our souls are mingled together, and banish all remembrance of wrongs. For this reason Christ said, ‘If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ (Matthew 5:23-24). The kiss therefore is reconciliation, and for this reason is holy. As the blessed Paul cried, ‘Greet one another with a holy kiss’ (1 Corinthians 16:20); and Peter, ‘Greet one another with a kiss of love’” (1 Peter 5:14).

Ambrose of Milan stated²⁵⁴ that “We kiss Christ with the Kiss of Communion!” This makes sense from what the Lord stated will be His basis at the Last Judgment, “I was hungry and you

²⁵¹ Eusebius Pamphilius, Church History, IV, 18.

²⁵² Justin Martyr, First Apology, 65.

²⁵³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XXIII, 3.

²⁵⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Letter to His Sister, XLI, 15.

gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink” (Matthew 25:35-37); and “inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me” (Matthew 25:40). We kiss Christ in other ways also.

“The Scriptures teach us concerning the infusion of special grace, that he kisses Christ who receives the Spirit, where the prophet says: ‘I opened my mouth and drew in the Spirit’ (Psalm 119:131 LXX). He, then, kisses Christ who confesses Him. ‘For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’ (Romans 10:10). He, again, kisses the feet of Christ who, when reading the Gospel, recognizes the acts of the Lord Jesus, and admires them with pious affection, and so piously he kisses, as it were, the footprints of the Lord Jesus as He walks. We kiss Christ, then, with the kiss of communion: ‘Let him that reads understand’” (Compare Matthew 24:15).

Paul referred to “a holy kiss” in several of his letters, but never mentions just “a kiss”. We can infer that Paul is referring to the “Kiss of Peace” on these occasions that was part of the Early Christian worship. Paul states:

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you” (Romans 16:16).

“All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss” (1 Corinthians 16:20).

“Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12).

“Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss” (1 Thessalonians 5:26).

John Chrysostom referred²⁵⁵ to Paul’s statement, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12). In this we declare that we are bound to each other. We kiss each other with the same lips that partake of the Lord’s Body and Blood, and that makes it a “holy kiss”.

“What is ‘holy?’ Not hollow, not treacherous like the kiss that Judas gave to Christ (Matthew 26:48). The kiss is given that it may be the fuel of love, that it may kindle the disposition, that we may so love each other, our brothers as their brothers, our children as their parents, our parents as their children. But even more! Those things are a disposition implanted by nature, but the Kiss of Peace is given by spiritual grace. Thus our souls are bound to each other. When we return after an absence we kiss each other. The mouth is that member which most of all declares to us the workings of the soul. About this holy kiss somewhat else may be said. We are the temple of Christ; we then kiss the porch and entrance of the temple when we kiss each other. Notice how many people kiss the porch of this temple, some stooping clown, others grasping it with their hand, and putting their hand to their mouth. Through these gates and doors Christ both entered into us, and still enters whenever we communicate. You who partake of the mysteries understand what I say. It is in no common manner that our lips are honored, when they receive the Lord’s Body. It is for this reason chiefly that we partake of the ‘Kiss of Peace’”.

Misuse of the Kiss of Peace

Among the misuses of the Kiss of Peace, the most obvious and glaring is the one given to Christ by His betrayer Judas Iscariot.

²⁵⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXX, v. 12.

John Chrysostom described²⁵⁶ the audacity and depravity that Judas exhibited in the Garden of Gethsemane when he betrayed Jesus. Judas used the “Kiss of Peace” that brothers use to show a warm regard for a close friend, as a capital crime arrest warrant. When Jesus received them, He first showed His power to thwart their purpose if He desired; then He willingly gave in to their deceit.

“Jesus foreknew that Judas would come to betray Him at Gethsemane; instead of running, He even went to meet him. ‘While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people’ (Matthew 26:47). Swords and clubs surely are the instruments of these priests! Again Jesus calls Judas ‘of the twelve’, and is not ashamed. Judas gave them a sign, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him’ (Matthew 26:48). What depravity had the traitor’s soul received! With what kind of eyes did he then look at his Master? With what mouth did he kiss Him? O accursed purpose; what did he devise? What did he dare? What sort of sign of betrayal did he give? ‘Whomever I shall kiss’, he said. He was instilled with boldness by his Master’s gentleness, which more than anything was sufficient to shame him, and to deprive him of all excuse since he was betraying One so meek.”

“But why does Jesus say this? Often when seized by them Jesus had gone out through the midst, without their knowing it (See Luke 4:30; John 8:59, 10:39). This also would have been done if it had not been His own will that He should be taken. To teach them this, He blinded their eyes, and Himself asked, ‘Whom are you seeking?’ (John 18:4) They didn’t know Him, even having lanterns and torches, and having Judas with them. As they said, ‘Jesus’, He said, ‘I AM’ and ‘they drew back and fell to the ground’ (John 18:6). Here again, He said to Judas, ‘Friend, why have you come?’” (Matthew 26:50)

“Having shown His own strength, then He yielded Himself. But John said, that even up to that moment He continued to reprove Judas, saying, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’ (Luke 22:48) Are you not ashamed even of the form of the betrayal? Nevertheless, forasmuch as not even this checked Judas, He submitted to be kissed, and gave Himself up willingly. And they laid their hands on Him, and seized Him that night on which they ate the Passover.”

Chrysostom also noted²⁵⁷ that Christ treated Judas, who He knew would betray Him, exactly as He had instructed His followers to do to their enemies (Matthew 5:44-45).

“Christ repaid Judas, who was about to betray Him, with everything opposite from what we would think. He washed his feet, convicted him secretly, rebuked him sparingly, tended him, allowed him to share His table and His kiss, and not even by these was Judas made better. Nevertheless Christ continued doing His own part.”

Chrysostom further pointed out²⁵⁸ in detail the magnitude of Judas’ treachery, how cold and unfeeling he had become. Yet He was warm and friendly to Judas right to the end. Chrysostom made this an example for us on how we should deal with our enemies and those that hate us.

²⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXIII, 2.

²⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XIII, 3.

²⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXI, v. 13.

“Jesus shows us that we ought not to disassociate ourselves even from those that would lead us away to death. Do not tell me that so and so has done us grievous harm, but just consider what Christ did near the Cross, wishing to amend by His kiss the traitor by whom He was on the point of being betrayed. Notice how much power He used to shame him. He said, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48) Who is there He would not have softened? Who is there that these words would not have made to yield? What a beast! Do not then say, that such a one murdered such a one, and that is why I disassociate myself from him. Even if he were on the point of thrusting a sword down into you, or plunging a dagger into your neck, kiss this same right hand! Christ even kissed the mouth that caused His death! Therefore we should not hate him that plots against us, but bewail and pity him. Such a one deserves pity at our hands, and tears. We are the servants of Him Who kissed even the traitor (I will not cease dwelling on that continually), and spoke words to him more gentle than the kiss. Jesus did not say, ‘O you foul and villainous traitor, is this the sort of recompense you return for so great a benefit?’ But in what words? ‘Judas’, using his own name, which is more like a person bemoaning, and recalling him, than one angry at him. Jesus does not say, your Teacher, your Master, and Benefactor, but ‘the Son of Man’. It is with One Who is so gently, so unpretentiously affected towards you, as even to kiss you at the time of betrayal, that a kiss was the signal for the betrayal. Is it with Him that you play the part of a traitor? Blessed are You, O Lord! What lowliness of mind, what forbearance have You given us examples of!”

Other misuses of the Kiss of Peace come in everyday life when we partake of the Eucharist in hypocrisy, pretending to love our brethren, but concealing our hatred or dislike. Of this Chrysostom stated²⁵⁹ that it is an outrage:

“How shall we present ourselves before the judgment-seat of Christ, if we presume upon His body with polluted hands and lips? We would not attempt to kiss a king with an unclean mouth; yet the King of heaven do we kiss with an unclean soul? This is an outrage!”

Readings from James 1:1 to 2:13

Important Feast Days in the Orthodox Church often prescribe Readings from the Old Testament for the Vespers service the evening before the Feast Day. In some cases, such as with the Twelve Apostles, the Old Testament Readings are replaced with Readings from the New Testament. For example, the Readings for Vespers are the same for the Evangelist Mark as for the Apostle James the Son of Zebedee; and parts of the Readings from the Epistle of James for the Evangelist Mark are used also for the Readings for the Apostles Thomas, Philip and James the Son of Alphaeus.

The Usefulness of the Wisdom Literature of the Scriptures

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you

²⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, Moral.

may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:1-5).

Cyril of Jerusalem contrasted²⁶⁰ the Wisdom of God (such as the Wisdom Literature) with the wisdom of man. Paul referred to this contrast also where his message was not man's wisdom but the wisdom of God

“Our speech and our preaching is not in persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:4). We stir now no sophisticated contrivances; for these become exposed; we do not conquer words with words, for these come to an end; but we preach Christ Crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23), who has already been preached before by the Prophets. Please receive the testimonies, and seal them in your heart. Listen now to a few of the more important as time permits; having received these beginnings, be diligent to seek out the remainder. Don't let your hand be extended to receive, but withdrawn when it is time to work (Ecclesiasticus 4:31). ‘If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him’ (James 1:5). May He through your prayer grant utterance to us, who speak, and faith to you who listen.”

The Double-Minded

The term, “double-minded” occurs several places in Scripture. James stated, “Let a man ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits” (James 1:6-11). James also stated, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded” (James 4:8).

The Psalmist stated, “I have inherited Your testimonies forever; for they are the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your ordinances forever, in return for Your mercies. I have hated transgressors; but I have loved Your Law” (Psalm 119:111-113 LXX). And again, “Everyone has spoken vanity to his neighbor; their lips are deceitful, they have spoken with a double heart” (Psalm 12:2 LXX).

But what does “double-minded” really mean? Gregory the Great described²⁶¹ what double-mindedness is and what its effects are. It occurs when someone is crooked but pretends he is wise and kind. The prophets described these people using the terms “fenced cities” and “lofty corners”; fenced in that they do not allow the truth to reach them; corners in that they are insincere and doubled back on themselves in duplicity.

“It is a special evil of the double-minded, that while they deceive others by their crooked and double conduct, they glory as though they were surpassingly prudent beyond others. They do not consider the strictness of retribution; they exult, miserable men that they are, in their own losses. Let them hear the power of

²⁶⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XIII, 8.

²⁶¹ Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, The Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 11.

divine rebuke, ‘Behold the day of the Lord cometh, great and horrible, the day of wrath, that day; a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of cloud and whirlwind, a day of trumpet and clangor, upon all fenced cities, and upon all lofty corners’ (Zephaniah 1:15-16). What is expressed by fenced cities but minds suspected and surrounded ever with a fallacious defense; minds which, as often as their fault is attacked, do not allow the darts of truth to reach them? What is signified by lofty corners (a wall being always double in corners) but insincere hearts? While they shun the simplicity of truth, they are in a manner doubled back on themselves in the crookedness of duplicity; what is worse, from their fault of insincerity, they lift themselves in their thoughts with the pride of prudence. Therefore the day of the Lord comes full of vengeance and rebuke on fenced cities and on lofty corners, because the wrath of the last judgment both destroys human hearts that have been closed against the truth, and exposes such as have been folded up in duplicities. Then the fenced cities fall, because souls which God has not penetrated will be damned. Then the lofty corners tumble, because hearts which erect themselves in the prudence of insincerity are prostrated by the sentence of righteousness.”

Double mindedness is listed among the worst sins²⁶² in the Early Church, and there are many references to this among the early written documents. The sin of “double-mindedness” is spoken of in company with such sins as covetousness, lying and slander among others. These things are opposite Godliness, and are pleasing to demons.

Moses gave an example of a double-minded man, “If any man is afraid and of a fearful heart let him not go to war; let him go back and return home, lest he make the hearts of his brethren to fear as he himself is timid and frightened” (Deuteronomy 20:8). John Cassian referred²⁶³ to such a person as being “double-minded”; going to battle to fight what God has commanded, but being fearful of doing so.

“They are asked to withdraw from the battle and return to their homes, because a man cannot fight the Lord’s battle with a double heart. ‘He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways’ (James 1:8). According to that Parable in the Gospel, he who goes out with ten thousand men against a king, who comes with twenty thousand, cannot possibly fight (Luke 14:31-32). While he is yet a great way off, ask for conditions of peace. That is, it is better for someone not even to take the first step towards the Lord’s ministry, rather than afterwards following it up with a lukewarm Faith, involving himself in still greater dangers. ‘It is better that you should not vow, than that you should vow and not pay’ (Ecclesiastes 5:5 LXX). There is great insight for the one to be described as coming with ten thousand and the other with twenty. For the number of sins, which attack us, is far larger than that of the virtues which fight for us. But ‘no man can serve God and Mammon’ (Matthew 6:24). And ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’” (Luke 9:62).

²⁶² See for example: Clement of Rome, 1st Epistle to Corinth, 23.

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, 2

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, II, ii, 6; II, iii, 21; IV, ii, 14; VII, I, 4.

²⁶³ John Cassian, Institutes of the Coenobia, VII, 15.

Ambrose of Milan used²⁶⁴ anger as an illustration of double-mindedness. Anger digs up sin, but it is possible to be angry and not sin. If one is alternately angry and calm, he is not governing his anger; how will it be possible for him to govern others?

“It is an old saying: Accustom yourself to be consistent, that your life may set forth as it were a picture, always preserving the same representation which it has received. How can he be consistent who at one time is inflamed by anger, at another blazes up with fierce indignation, whose face now burns, and now again is changed to paleness, varying and changing color every moment? It is natural for one to be angry, but there is generally a cause; it is a man’s duty to restrain anger and not to be carried away like a lion by fury. He needs to know how to be quiet, how not to spread tales, how not to embitter family quarrels. It is written, ‘A wrathful man digs up sin’ (Proverbs 15:18). He will not be consistent who is double-minded; he cannot be consistent who cannot restrain himself when angry. David well says, ‘Be angry, and do not sin’ (Psalm 4:4). If we don’t govern our anger, we indulge our natural disposition; we cannot prevent anger but we may moderate it. Therefore even though we are angry, let our passion admit only such emotion as is according to nature, not sin contrary to nature. If we are unable to govern ourselves, how will we be able to govern others?”

The Unstable

James stated, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. Let a man ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. Let not those men suppose that they will receive anything from the Lord; they are double-minded men, unstable in all their ways” (James 1:5-8).

Athanasius of Alexandria stated²⁶⁵ that the Arians of his day were double-minded and unstable in their ways. No one could pin them down regarding what they believed, and thus they were children of the devil.

“They are committing a crime in their thought to slander so great and ecumenical a Council as at Nicaea. They are in transgression when they dare to confront that good definition against Arianism, acknowledged as it is, by those who had taught them heresy. Even after signing the decrees of the Council, Eusebius of Nicomedia and his fellows changed again, and return like dogs to their own vomit of heresy. These slanderers deserve to be detested further, because they sacrifice their souls’ liberty to others; they are willing to take these persons as masters of their heresy. They are double-minded men, unstable in all their ways (James 1:8); they don’t have just one opinion, but change it back and forth, now recommending certain statements, but soon dishonoring them, and in turn recommending what they had previously slandered. This is ‘the child of the devil’, and the response of hucksters rather than of doctors. What our Fathers have delivered, this is truly doctrine; and this is truly the token of doctors, to confess the same thing with each other, and to vary neither from themselves nor from their fathers. They who don’t have this character are to be called not true doctors but evil doctors. The Greeks,

²⁶⁴ Ambrose of Milan, Letters, Epistle 63, 60.

²⁶⁵ Athanasius of Alexandria, Defense of the Nicene Definition, II, 4.

not witnessing to the same doctrines, but quarrelling one with another, have no truth of teaching; but the holy and trustworthy heralds of the truth agree together, and do not differ. Though they lived in different times, yet they one and all tend the same way, being prophets of the one God, and preaching the same Word harmoniously.”

Basil the Great stated²⁶⁶ that men are like clouds, unstable, shifting with the winds. But he said that the Arians of his day were the worst of all, worse than the heathen. They were always changing their opinions, depending on who they were with, and who challenged them.

“Men are like clouds, shifting here and there in the sky with the change of the winds. Of all men who have ever come within my experience, the Arians are the most unstable. As to the other business of life, those who have lived with them may give evidence. But as to what is within my own knowledge, their inconsistency regarding the Faith, I have never myself observed it or heard from anyone else, of anything like it. Originally they were followers of Arius; then they went over to Hermogenes, who was diametrically opposed to the errors of Arius, as is evinced by the Creed originally recited by him at Nicaea. Hermogenes fell asleep, and then they went over to Eusebius, the leader of the chorus of the Arian ring, as we know on personal evidence. Leaving this, for whatever reasons, they came home again, and once more concealed their Arian sentiments. After reaching the episcopate, how many creeds did they generate? They generated one at Ancyra; another at Seleucia; another at Constantinople, the famous one; another at Lampsacus, then that of Nike in Thrace; and now again the creed of Cyzicus. They have suppressed the homoousion²⁶⁷, and are supporting the ‘like in essence’, while they subscribe with Eunomius the blasphemies against the Holy Spirit. All of the creeds which I have enumerated may not be opposed to one another, yet they alike exhibit the inconsistency of the men’s minds, from their never standing by the same words.”

John Chrysostom stated²⁶⁸ that there are some who have the Name of Faith, but who are unstable and easily led astray; Christ does not commit Himself to them, but conceals many things from them. Similarly He did not give signs to the Jewish leaders when they asked for them.

“He Who dwells in men’s hearts, and enters into their thoughts, paid no attention to outward words. Knowing well that their warmth was but for a season, He didn’t place confidence in them as perfect disciples right away, nor committed all His teaching to them as though they had already become firm believers. To know what is in the heart of men belongs to God alone, ‘He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually’ (Psalm 33:14-15). Solomon added, ‘You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men’ (1 Kings 8:39). He therefore didn’t need witnesses to learn the thoughts of His own creatures, and so He felt no confidence in them because of their temporary belief. Men, who know neither the present nor the future, often entrust everything without any reserve to persons who approach them deceitfully and who soon will fall away from them.

²⁶⁶ Basil the Great, Letter to Patrophilus, Bishop of Aegae, CCXLIV, 9.

²⁶⁷ “Homoousion” is the Greek word used at the Council of Nicaea to describe Jesus as being “consubstantial” with the Father. This word was used specifically to counteract the Arian opinion. The Arians tiptoed around this for many decades with terms such as “like in essence”: that is, Christ is not equal to the Father, but is “like the Father”.

²⁶⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXIV, 1.

Christ did not do so, for well He knew all their secret thoughts. There are many such now, who have the name of the Faith, but are unstable and easily led away; therefore Christ does not commit Himself to them, but conceals from them many things, just as we do not place confidence in mere acquaintances but only in real friends. Listen to what He said to His disciples toward the end of His ministry, ‘No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you’ (John 15:15). Why is this? He gave no signs to the Jews who asked for them, because they asked tempting Him. The asking for signs is a practice of tempters both then and now; for even now there are some that seek them and say, ‘Why don’t miracles take place at this present time?’ If you are faithful, as you ought to be, and love Christ as you ought to love Him, you have no need of signs; they are given to the unbelievers. ‘How then were they not given to the Jews?’ one asks. Given they certainly were; and if there were times when they asked and they did not receive them, it was because they asked them not that they might be delivered from their unbelief, but in order the more to confirm their wickedness.

Clement of Alexandria stated²⁶⁹ that men sin by choosing the same things as the demons; by doing so, they become unstable and fickle like the demons.

“Let no one say that he who does wrong and sins transgresses through the agency of demons; for then he would be guiltless. He sins by choosing the same things as demons; being unstable, light and fickle in his desires, like a demon, he becomes a demoniac man. He, who is bad, having become through evil sinful by nature, becomes depraved, having what he has chosen. Being sinful, He sins also in his actions. Contrariwise, the good man does right. Therefore we call not only the virtues, but also right actions, good.”

Clement also stated²⁷⁰ that most men are unstable and resemble storms. The Sabbath Day was an antidote: to restrain men from evil and direct them to doing good.

Most men have a disposition that is unstable and heedless, like the nature of storms. Those who lack faith have done many good things, and those of faith have done many evil things. But to disbelieve truth brings death, but to believe truth brings life; again, to believe the lie and to disbelieve the truth hurries to destruction. The same is the case with self-restraint and licentiousness. To restrain one’s self from doing good is the work of demons; but to keep from wrong is the beginning of salvation. This is why the Sabbath was ordained; by abstinence from evil, it indicates self-restraint.

Enduring Temptation

“Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and

²⁶⁹ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VI, 12.

²⁷⁰ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 3.

enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (James 1:12-16).

Athanasius of Alexandria, in documenting the Life of Antony the Great, noted²⁷¹ that the struggle against temptation is a life-long endeavor in battling the demons.

“Let us struggle that wrath doesn’t rule us nor lust overcome us; for it is written, ‘The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God’ (James 1:20). And, ‘When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death’ (James 1:15). Thus living, let us keep guard carefully, and as it is written, ‘Keep your hearts with all watchfulness’ (Proverbs 4:23). We have terrible and crafty foes -- the evil spirits -- and against them we wrestle. As Paul said, ‘We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*’ (Ephesians 6:12). Great is their number in the air around us, and they are not far from us. But at this time it is pressing and necessary for us only to know their wiles against ourselves.”

Athanasius continued²⁷² to describe the tactics of the demons. First they try temptations to get us to sin; if this doesn’t work, they try to frighten us into doing what they want. If they are beaten by this, they try to disguise themselves in spiritual things; if that fails, they bring their leader and start over again.

“If the demons see any Christians laboring cheerfully and advancing, they first make an attack by temptation and place hindrances to hamper our way, such as evil thoughts. But we need not fear their suggestions, for by prayer, fasting and faith in the Lord, their attack immediately fails. But even when they fail, they don’t cease, but knavishly by subtlety come on again. When they cannot deceive the heart openly with foul pleasures they approach in different disguise. Shaping displays they attempt to strike fear, changing their shapes, taking the forms of seductive women, wild beasts, creeping things, gigantic bodies, and troops of soldiers. Not even then do you need to fear their deceitful displays. They are nothing and quickly disappear, especially if a man fortifies himself beforehand with faith and the sign of the cross. Yet they are bold and very shameless, for if they are beaten in this manner they make an onslaught in another manner. They pretend to prophesy, foretell the future, and show themselves of a height reaching to the roof and of great strength. They do this that they may stealthily catch by such displays those who could not be deceived by their arguments. If after all this they find the soul strengthened by faith and a hopeful mind, then they bring their leader to their aid.”

Jerome of Bethlehem, in writing against Montanus and Novatian, who contended that true Christians do not sin after Baptism, pointed out²⁷³ what James and Peter said. We all sin, but we are all able to repent. God remembers our good deeds and is not around just to punish sin. When we make it our goal to serve the Lord, temptations will come to us!

“Montanus and Novatian contend that it is ‘impossible to renew them again to repentance, those who crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him*

²⁷¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Life of Antony, 21.

²⁷² Athanasius of Alexandria, Life of Antony, 23.

²⁷³ Jerome of Bethlehem, Against Jovinianus, II, 3.

to an open shame' (Hebrew 6:4-6). Paul corrects this notion by saying: 'We are confident of better things of you, things that accompany salvation; for God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His Name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and still do minister' (Hebrews 6:9-10). The unrighteousness of God would be great, if He merely punished sin, and did not welcome good works. I have so spoken, says Paul, to withdraw you from your sins, and to make you more careful through fear of despair. But, beloved, I am confident of better things of you, and things that accompany salvation. For it is not accordant with the righteousness of God to remember sins only and forget good works, and the fact that you have ministered and do minister to the Saints for His Name's sake. James, knowing that the baptized can be tempted, and fall of their own free choice, says, 'Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him' (James 1:12). That we may not think that we are tempted by God, James adds, 'Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren' (James 1:13-16). God created us with free will, and we are not forced by necessity either to virtue or to vice. Otherwise, if there is just necessity, there would be no crown. As in good works it is God who brings them to perfection, for 'it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy' (Romans 9:16) and gives us help that we may be able to reach the goal. So in things wicked and sinful, the seeds within us give the impulse, and these are brought to maturity by the devil. When he sees that we are building on the foundation of Christ, hay, wood, stubble, then he applies the match. Let us then build gold, silver, costly stones, and he will not venture to tempt us; although even thus there is not a sure and safe possession. The lion lurks in ambush to slay the innocent. 'As a furnace tests a potter's vessels, so a man's reasoning process reveals his heart' (Ecclesiasticus 27:5 LXX). Sirach also said, 'My sons, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation' (Ecclesiasticus 2:1 LXX). Again James says: 'Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was' (James 1:22-24). It would have been useless to warn them to add works to faith, if they could not sin after baptism. He tells us, 'Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all' (James 2:10). Which of us is without sin? 'God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all' (Romans 11:32). Peter also says: 'The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations'" (2 Peter 2:9).

John Cassian pointed out²⁷⁴ an important aspect of what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer. We do not pray to escape all temptation; we pray for the ability to endure it.

"We pray, 'And do not lead us into temptation' (Matthew 6:13), on which there arises no unimportant question. If we pray that we may not be allowed to be

²⁷⁴ John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Isaac, I, ix, 23.

tempted, how then will our power of endurance be proven? ‘A man who has not been tested knows little’ (Ecclesiasticus 34:10 LXX); and again, ‘Blessed is the man who endures temptation’ (James 1:12). The clause then, ‘Lead us not into temptation’, does not mean ‘do not permit us ever to be tempted’, but do not permit us when we fall into temptation to be overcome. For Job was tempted, but was not led into temptation. He did not ascribe folly or blasphemy to God, nor with impious mouth did he yield to that wish of the tempter toward which he was drawn. Abraham was tempted; Joseph was tempted; but neither of them was led into temptation for neither of them yielded his consent to the tempter. Next there follows, ‘But deliver us from evil’; i.e., do not allow us to be tempted by the devil above that we are able, but ‘with the temptation also make the way of escape, that we may be able to bear it’” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

John Cassian noted²⁷⁵ how we go about enduring temptation: its foundation is profound humility. Patience during temptation is only worthy of admiration if it is preserved when attacked by enemies. It is like the house founded on the rock and not on the sand. Saints and sinners are both tempted the same; but the saint is not beaten even by a great assault while the sinner is overcome by even a small temptation.

“True patience and tranquility is neither gained nor retained without profound humility of heart. It will seek no external support from anything, if it has the internal support of the virtue of humility, its mother and its guardian. If we are disturbed when attacked by anyone it is clear that the foundations of humility have not been securely laid in us, and at the outbreak even of a small storm, our whole edifice is shaken and ruinously disturbed. Patience would not be worthy of praise and admiration if it only preserved its tranquility when attacked by no darts of enemies. It is grand and glorious because when the storms of temptation beat on it, it remains unmoved. Patience gets its name from the passions and endurance, and so no one can be called patient but one who bears without annoyance all the indignities offered to him. It is not without reason that he is praised by Solomon, ‘A man slow to anger is better than a strong *man*; he that governs *his* temper is better than he that takes a city’ (Proverbs 16:32 LXX); and again: ‘A man slow to wrath abounds in wisdom: but a man of impatient spirit is very foolish’ (Proverbs 14:29 LXX). When anyone is overcome by a wrong and blazes up in a fire of anger, we should not say that the bitterness of the insult offered to him is the cause of his sin. Rather it is the revealing of secret weakness, in accordance with the parable our Lord spoke about the two houses, one of which was founded on a rock, and the other on the sand. On both houses the tempest of rain, water and storm beat equally; but that one which was founded on the solid rock felt no harm at all from the violence of the shock, while that which was built on the shifting and moving sand collapsed at once. It fell, not because it was struck by the rush of the storms and torrents. but because it was imprudently built on the sand. A saint does not differ from a sinner in this; he is tempted in the same way; but he is not beaten even by a great assault, while the other is overcome even by a slight temptation. The fortitude of any good man would not be worthy of praise if his victory was gained without his being tempted; there is no room for victory where there is no struggle and conflict. ‘Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been

²⁷⁵ John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Piamun, III, xviii, 13.

approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him' (James 1:12). Paul said, 'My strength is made perfect', not in ease and delights, but 'in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). 'For behold', says He, 'Behold, I have made you this day as a strong city, and as a brazen wall, strong *against* all the kings of Judah, and the princes thereof, and the people of the land. They shall fight against you; but they shall by no means prevail against you; because I am with you, to deliver you'" (Jeremiah 1:18-19 LXX).

Cyprian of Carthage stated²⁷⁶ that those receiving the crown of life will not be just the martyrs, but also those who were willing to be martyred but weren't selected for death.

"I wish that the circumstances would permit me to present myself at this time with the martyrs; promptly and gladly would I fulfill all the duties of love towards our most courageous brethren in my appointed ministry. Do all those things that ought to be done with respect to those whom the divine condescension has rendered illustrious by their faith and virtue. Let there be also a more zealous watchfulness and care bestowed on the bodies of all those who, although they were not tortured in prison, yet depart by the glorious exit of death. Neither their virtue nor their honor is too little for them also to be allied with the blessed martyrs. As far as they could, they bore whatever they were equipped to bear. He who under the eyes of God has offered himself to tortures and to death, has suffered whatever he was willing to suffer; for it was not that he missed the tortures, but the tortures missed him. 'Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 10:32), said the Lord. Those receiving the crown of life have confessed Him; 'He who endures to the end will be saved' (Matthew 10:22), said the Lord. They have endured and have carried the uncorrupted and unstained merits of their virtues through, even to the end. It is written, 'Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life' (Revelation 2:10). They have persevered in their faithfulness, steadfastness and invincibility, even to death. When to the willingness and the confession of the Name in prison and in chains is added also the conclusion of dying, the glory of the martyr is consummated."

Understanding Our Place with God

James said, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures" (James 1:16-18). Let us look at some of the details of this.

The Father of Lights

We might ask, Who is "The Father of Lights"? The Father of Lights would seem to refer to God the Father, where He brought us forth by the word of truth, which seems to refer to His teachings from the Scriptures.

²⁷⁶ Cyprian of Carthage, Epistles, XXXVI, 1.

John of Damascus stated²⁷⁷ that the fair garden of the Scriptures, illumined by the Holy Spirit, bear us up to Christ and brings us through Him to the Father of Lights.

“Let us knock at that fair garden of the Scriptures, so fragrant, sweet and blooming, with its varied sounds of spiritual and divinely-inspired birds ringing all round our ears. It lays hold of our hearts, comforts the mourner, pacifies the angry and fills him with joy everlasting. It sets our mind on the gold-gleaming, brilliant back of the divine dove, whose bright pinions bear up to the only-begotten Son and Heir of the Husbandman of that spiritual Vineyard and brings us through Him to the Father of Lights. Let us not knock carelessly but zealously and constantly, lest knocking we grow weary. Thus it will be opened to us. If we read once or twice and do not understand what we read, let us not grow weary, but let us persist, let us talk much, let us enquire. For ‘ask your Father, and He will show you; your elders and they will tell you. Every man does not have that knowledge. Let us draw of the fountain of the garden perennial and purest waters springing into life eternal.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is often referred to as “The Light”, where this “light” is sometimes referred to as the uncreated light. For example:

- “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. John the Baptist came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:4-9).
- “The light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:19).
- “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).
- “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5).
- “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).
- “I have come *as* a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46).
- “He alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16).
- “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5, 7).

When Paul met the Risen Christ on the Road to Damascus, it was the uncreated light that overwhelmed Paul and his companions. “As I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me”. “Those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me”. “Since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus” (Acts 22:6, 9, 11).

²⁷⁷ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 15.

After the Second Coming of Christ, it will be this uncreated light that illumines everything. “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light”. “Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; For the Lord will be your everlasting light” (Isaiah 60:19-20). “The nations, of those who are saved, shall walk in its light. The kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it” (Revelation 21:24). “There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:5). As a preview of the Second Coming, Peter, James and John saw Jesus as He really is: “Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew 17:2).

The Word of Truth

James said, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures” (James 1:18). Of this “word of truth”, Paul wrote, “In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14). So then the “word of truth” is the Scriptures! Paul also wrote to Timothy about this, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15); where “rightly dividing the word of truth” refers to correctly interpreting the Scriptures.

Polycarp of Smyrna noted²⁷⁸ that Paul, when he was at Philippi, taught the word of truth to the Church there.

“Neither I, nor anyone else, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed Paul. When he was among you, he accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. When absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find it to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you. If this is followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, Christ, and our neighbor, it ‘is the mother of us all’” (Galatians 4:26).

Ignatius of Antioch warned²⁷⁹ the same Philippians to beware of workers of iniquity, since they corrupt the word of truth.

“Take care in the flesh, the soul, and the spirit, while you think of things perfect, and turn yourselves away from the workers of iniquity, who corrupt the word of truth. Be strengthened inwardly by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Athanasius of Alexandria stated²⁸⁰ that it is important to consider what we are nourished with. The soul can feed on either virtue or vice. If it feeds on virtue and the word of truth, the fruits of the Spirit result; if it feeds on vice, deeds of darkness result.

“Virtues and vices are the food of the soul and it can eat either of these two foods, according to its own will. If it is bent toward virtue, it will be nourished by virtues, righteousness, temperance, meekness, and fortitude; as Paul said, ‘Being nourished by the word of truth’ (1 Timothy 4:6). Such was the case with our Lord

²⁷⁸ Polycarp of Smyrna, Epistle to the Philippians, 3.

²⁷⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Philippians, 15.

²⁸⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, I, 5.

who said, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’ (John 4:34). But if it is not thus with the soul and it inclines downwards, it is then nourished by nothing but sin. Thus the Holy Spirit, describing sinners and their food, referred to the devil when He said, ‘You broke to pieces the heads of the dragon; You gave him *as* food to the Ethiopian nations’ (Psalm 74:14 LXX). This is the food of sinners. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, being heavenly bread, is the food of the saints; ‘Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you’ (John 6:53). So the devil is the food of the impure, and of those who do nothing which is of the light, but work the deeds of darkness. Therefore, in order to withdraw and turn them from vices, He commands them to be nourished with the food of virtue; namely, humbleness of mind, lowliness to endure humiliations, and the acknowledgment of God.”

Gregory of Nyssa noted²⁸¹ that the word of truth would seem to be recommended even by the voice of its enemies.

Gregory the Great stated²⁸² that Christians should not injure the word of truth by yielding anything or by compromising our character.

“We show that our warfare is in behalf of Christ by fighting as Christ, the peaceable and meek, Who has borne our infirmities, fought. Though peaceable, we do not injure the word of truth, by yielding anything, just to gain a reputation for reasonableness. We do not pursue that which is good by means of evil; and we are peaceable by the legitimate character of our warfare, confined as it is to our own limits, and the rules of the Spirit.”

Basil the Great cautioned us²⁸³ not to be distressed at slander and mockery so long as the word of truth is on our side.

“So long as the word of truth is on our side, never be in any way distressed at the slander of a lie. Let no imperial threats scare you; do not be grieved at the laughter and mockery of your intimates, nor at the condemnation of those who pretend to care for you, and who put forward, as their most attractive bait to deceive, a pretense of giving good advice. Against them all let sound reason do battle, invoking the championship and aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, the teacher of the true Faith, for Whom to suffer is sweet, and ‘to die is gain’” (Philippians 1:21).

First-Fruits of His Creatures

James said, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures” (James 1:18). What did he mean by “the first-fruits of His creatures”? “First-fruits” originally referred to a tithe that was given to the Lord and was used by the priests²⁸⁴. “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land

²⁸¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, III, 3.

²⁸² Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration on The Last Farewell*, XLII, 13.

²⁸³ Basil the Great, *Letter to Macarius and John*, XVIII.

²⁸⁴ From the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, VIII, iv, 30, in the Early Church, the first-fruits were brought to the Bishop, the presbyters and deacons and were used for the maintenance of the clergy, the virgins and the widows just like the command under the Mosaic Law, where the Bishop replaced the High Priest.

which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest” (Leviticus 23:10).

One aspect of the first-fruits was the Feast of Pentecost, where two loaves of bread, made from the recent wheat harvest, were offered to the Lord (Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:17-20). Since Pentecost²⁸⁵ refers to the ordination of the work of the Church, the two loaves refer to Jew and Gentile together being offered to the Lord in the Church. God referred to Israel as His first-fruits: “I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-fruits on the fig tree in its first season” (Hosea 9:10). There was to be an additional aspect concerning first-fruits, which can refer both to the work of the Church in this age and to what happens at the Second Coming of Christ. “For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel”, says the Lord God, “there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the first-fruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country *for* which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers” (Ezekiel 20:40-42).

At the Resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ became our first-fruits when He rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). He was first; we will be like Him at His Second Coming. Just like the first-fruits of the wheat harvest, the subsequent wheat harvested is very much like the wheat harvested for the first-fruits. To understand this, we need to understand more about the meaning of Pentecost.

What happened on that Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem c. 30 AD was the beginning of a second (or a new) covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:8-13, 1 John 2:27) between God and His people. In Caesarea a few years later God emphasized that this covenant had two parts (or loaves), Jew and Gentile (Acts 10). Up until that time and continuing a number of years later, there was a reluctance, if not outright refusal, of the Hebrew believers to accept the Gentile believers unless the Gentile believers began following every statute of the First Covenant (see e.g. Acts 10:28, 11:6-8, 18, 15:4-11; Galatians 2:1-3, 11-14). According to Paul (Romans 2-6, Galatians 2:15-16, Hebrews 9:1-17) this was not necessary because of the differences in the covenants.

But this Feast of Pentecost was not just the beginning of a New Covenant between God and His people. It was also a beginning of a harvest. The harvest is represented by the 120 believers who had known Jesus during His 3½ year ministry, and who were “together with one accord” on this Feast of Pentecost (Acts 1:14-15, 2:1). Seed had been sown in their hearts (see the Parable of the Sower: (Matthew 13:3, 8, 18, 23; Mark 4; Luke 8) and it had taken root, grown and was about to be taken and offered to God as a First-Fruit wave offering. Just as the First-Fruit wheat (that was made into loaves) was the staple of the Hebrew diet, so these people (among whom are the Twelve Apostles) are the foundation of the Church that is about to be ordained (Revelation 21:14, 1 John 1:1-5, Acts 2:42).

²⁸⁵ For more details on the Feast of Pentecost, see Mark Kern, The Hebrew Feast Days, St Athanasius Press, 3rd Edition, 2009.

In contrast with the Day of First-Fruits seven weeks earlier, where a sheaf of individual grains was offered as a wave offering, here two loaves of grain that has been ground, sifted, and blended, is offered as the wave offering. So it was with the disciples. At their Lord's resurrection seven weeks earlier, they were, in a sense, a sheaf of individual grains, held together by seemingly little more than common experiences. They were not of one accord by any means as they had difficulty even believing one another's reports on having seen the Lord (cf. Matthew 28:17, Mark 16:8-14, Luke 24:9-13, 36-40, John 20:24-25). But things were different on that Feast of Pentecost. Now they were very closely knit together. The sifting that Satan had been allowed to do (Luke 22:31) had taken its toll on their unbelief. And three thousand people were converted as a result of their "wave offering" to the Lord (Acts 2:1-41).

Thus they became the first-fruits of His creatures as James writes!

Irenaeus of Lyons stated²⁸⁶ that the Holy Spirit brought distant tribes of the earth to unity as an offering to the Father of the first-fruits of all nations.

"David asked the Holy Spirit on behalf of the human race, 'Establish me with Your directing Spirit' (Psalm 51:12 LXX). Luke says that He descended at the day of Pentecost on the disciples after the Lord's ascension, having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life, and to the opening of the new covenant (Acts 2:38-47). Consequently with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations. Therefore the Lord promised to send the Comforter (John 16:7), who should join us to God. A compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity; so in like manner neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven."

Irenaeus also stated that the Lord established the Eucharist as the first-fruits of His own created things and as the new oblation of the New Covenant. Malachi foretold that this would happen. As we offer the first-fruits of His creation, honor and affection are shown toward the King. In doing this, we need to be reconciled to our brother and we should not come into His presence empty-handed. The Church alone can offer this oblation. Jews cannot since they have not received the Word through whom it is offered. Heretics (such as Cerinthus and Nicolas of Antioch²⁸⁷) cannot, since they portray God as being jealous of another's property.

"The Lord gave²⁸⁸ directions to His disciples to offer to God the first-fruits of His own created things -- not as if He stood in need of them, but that they might be themselves neither unfruitful nor ungrateful -- He took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and said, 'This is My body'. And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood, and taught the new oblation of the new covenant (Matthew 26:26-28). The Church received this from the Apostles and offers to God throughout the entire world, to Him who gives us as the means of subsistence the first-fruits of His own gifts in the New Testament. Malachi spoke of this: 'I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord Almighty, and I will not accept a sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun to the going

²⁸⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III, xvii, 2.

²⁸⁷ For more details on early heresies and their effect on the Church, see Mark Kern, *Simon Magus the Heresiarch*, St Athanasius Press, 2004.

²⁸⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV, xvii, 5.

down of the same my name has been glorified among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered to My Name, and a pure offering: for My Name is great among the Gentiles, says the Lord Almighty' (Malachi 1:10-11 LXX). This indicates in the plainest manner, by these words, that the former people [the Jews] shall indeed cease to make offerings to God, but that in every place sacrifice shall be offered to Him, and that a pure one; and His Name is glorified among the Gentiles."

The oblation of the Church²⁸⁹, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout the entire world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him. Not that He stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted. By the gift both honor and affection are shown forth towards the King. The Lord, wishing us to offer it in all simplicity and innocence, expressed Himself, 'Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift' (Matthew 5:23-24). We are bound, therefore, to offer to God the first-fruits of His creation, as Moses also says, 'You shall not appear in the presence of the Lord your God empty-handed' (Deuteronomy 16:16 LXX). So that man, being accounted as grateful, by those things in which he has shown his gratitude, may receive that honor which flows from Him.

"The Church offers²⁹⁰ with single-mindedness; her gift is justly reckoned a pure sacrifice with God. As Paul says, 'I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God' (Philippians 4:18). For it behooves us to make an oblation to God, and in all things to be found grateful to God our Maker, in a pure mind, and in faith without hypocrisy, in well-grounded hope, in fervent love, offering the first-fruits of His own created things. The Church alone offers this pure oblation to the Creator, offering to Him, with giving of thanks, [the things taken] from His creation. But the Jews do not offer thus; for their hands are full of blood; for they have not received the Word, through whom it is offered to God. Nor do any of the gatherings of the heretics [offer this]. For some, by maintaining that the Father is different from the Creator, when they offer to Him what belongs to this creation of ours, set Him forth as being covetous of another's property, and desirous of what is not His own."

John of Damascus described²⁹¹ the bread of the Lord's Table as the first-fruits of the future bread which is necessary for existence. The bread and wine are the deified body and blood of Christ. The bread is not plain bread, but bread united with divinity, thus having two natures. Melchizedek foreshadowed this and the Temple show-bread was an image. As a result, eating unworthily brings damnation down on oneself. We call this "communion" because through it we have communion with Christ and we all become one body of Christ.

"The bread and the wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid!) but the deified body of the Lord itself. The Lord has said, 'This is My body', not, this is a figure of My body; and 'My blood', not, a figure

²⁸⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xviii, 1.

²⁹⁰ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xviii, 4.

²⁹¹ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 13.

of My blood. On a previous occasion He had said to the Jews, ‘Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed’ (John 6:55); and again, ‘He that eats Me, shall live’” (John 6:51).

“The bread of the communion is not plain bread but bread united with divinity. But a body which is united with divinity is not one nature, but has one nature belonging to the body and another belonging to the divinity that is united to it, so that the compound is not one nature but two.”

“With bread and wine Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God, received Abraham on his return from the slaughter of the Gentiles (Genesis 14:18). That table pre-imagined this mystical table, just as that priest was a type and image of Christ, the true high-priest. ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Psalm 110:4). Of this bread the show-bread was an image. This surely is that pure and bloodless sacrifice which the Lord said is offered to Him from the rising to the setting of the sun” (Malachi 1:11).

“The body and blood of Christ are making for the support of our soul and body, without being consumed or suffering corruption, but for our being and preservation, a protection against all kinds of injury, a purging from all uncleanness. They purify from diseases and all kinds of calamities; according to the words of the Apostles, ‘If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world’ (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). This too is what he says, ‘He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body’ (1 Corinthians 11:29). Being purified by this, we are united to the body of Christ and to His Spirit and become the body of Christ.”

“This bread is the first-fruits of the future bread which is necessary for existence (*epiousios*). The word *epiousios* signifies either the future, that is Him Who is for a future age, or else Him of Whom we partake for the preservation of our essence. Whether then it is in this sense or that, it is fitting to speak so of the Lord’s body. For the Lord’s flesh is life-giving spirit because it was conceived of the life-giving Spirit. For what is born of the Spirit is spirit. But I do not say this to take away the nature of the body, but I wish to make clear its life-giving and divine power” (John 6:63).

“But if some persons called the bread and the wine antitypes of the body and blood of the Lord, as did the divinely inspired Basil, they said so not after the consecration but before the consecration, so calling the offering itself.”

“Participation is spoken of; through it we partake of the divinity of Jesus. Communion, too, is spoken of, and it is an actual communion, because through it we have communion with Christ and share in His flesh and His divinity; we have communion and are united with one another through it. Since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another, being of one body with Christ.”

What God Seeks of Us

James stated, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay

aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:19-21).

There is a particular kind of meekness and humility that we need to adapt to in order to relate to an infinite God. Above all, we need to receive the Word which is implanted in us at Baptism. How do we do this, and what are some things to watch out for?

Slow to Speak

We might think of someone who is always talking – especially talking down to others – as being arrogant and rude. This would imply that someone of the opposite personality is more polite and courteous. But is there more to it than that? How is being “slow to speak” connected to the “Righteousness of God”?

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, warned²⁹² against idle words and excessive speaking; this can lead to all kinds of grief. Christ stated that we must give an account for every idle word at Judgment Day. Therefore James cautioned everyone to be quick to hear and slow to speak.

“The lazy mind for the most part lapses by degrees into downfall; as we neglect to guard against idle words we go on to hurtful ones. At first it pleases us to talk of other men’s affairs; afterwards the tongue gnaws at the lives of those of whom we talk; but at last we break out into open slander. As we do this, we sow prickling thorns, quarrels arise, the torches of enmities are kindled, and the peace of hearts is extinguished. Solomon well said, ‘the beginning of strife is like releasing water (Proverbs 17:14). To release water is to let loose the tongue to a flux of speech. On the other hand, in a good sense it is said, ‘The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook (Proverbs 18:4). He therefore who releases water is the wellspring of strife, because he who does not curb his tongue drives away concord. Anyone who gives himself to much speaking cannot keep the way of righteousness. Solomon says, ‘In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise’ (Proverbs 10:19). The righteousness of the mind is desolated when there is no limit to immoderate speaking. James says, ‘If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.’ (James 1:26). Again he says, ‘let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath’ (James 1:19). Again, defining the power of the tongue, James adds, ‘No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison’ (James 3:8). The Truth in person admonishes us, ‘For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment’ (Matthew 12:36). Every word is idle that lacks either a reason of just necessity or an intention of pious usefulness. If then an account is required of idle discourse, let us weigh well what punishment results from much speaking, in which there is also the sin of hurtful words.”

John Cassian wrote²⁹³ that those who desire to become teachers need to become perfected by the excellence of their own actions. By overcoming the passions, they prepare a holy tabernacle in their heart for spiritual knowledge. This holy tabernacle gets prepared by our being “slow to

²⁹² Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 14.

²⁹³ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Nesteros, II, xiv, 9.

“speak”. Moving too quickly into teaching can cause an arrogance of vainglory; with this, it is impossible to obtain the gift of true knowledge.

“If you are anxious to attain to the light of spiritual knowledge, not wrongly for an idle boast but for the sake of being made better men, you are first inflamed with the longing for that blessedness, of which we read, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). You may also attain to that of which the angel said to Daniel, ‘Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever’ (Daniel 12:3). And in another prophet, ‘Sow for yourselves righteousness; gather in the fruit of life; light for yourselves the light of knowledge; seek the Lord till the fruits of righteousness come upon you (Hosea 10:12 LXX). Keep up that diligence in reading, and endeavor with all eagerness to gain in the first place a thorough grasp of practical, i.e., ethical knowledge. Without this, theoretical purity cannot be obtained. Only those, who are perfected not by the words of others who teach them, but by the excellence of their own actions, can after much expenditure of effort and toil attain as a reward for it. They gain their knowledge not from meditation on the law but from the fruit of their labor; they sing with the Psalmist, ‘I gain understanding by thy commandments; therefore I have hated every way of unrighteousness’ (Psalm 119:104 LXX). Having overcome all their passions, they say with confidence, ‘I will sing, and I will understand in the undefiled way’ (Psalm 101:1-2). He, who is striving in an undefiled way in the course of a pure heart, as he sings the Psalm, understands the words which are chanted. Therefore if you want to prepare in your heart a holy tabernacle of spiritual knowledge, purge yourselves from the stain of all sins, and rid yourselves of the cares of this world. It is an impossibility for the soul which is taken up even to a small extent with worldly troubles, to gain the gift of knowledge or to become an author of spiritual interpretation, and diligent in reading holy things. Be careful therefore in the first place, to impose absolute silence on your lips, in order that your zeal for reading and the efforts of your purpose may not be destroyed by vain pride. This is the first practical step towards learning, to receive the regulations and opinions of all the Elders with an earnest heart, and with lips that are dumb; and diligently to lay them up in your heart, and endeavor rather to perform than to teach them. From teaching comes the dangerous arrogance of vainglory; but from performing comes the fruit of spiritual knowledge. You should never venture to say anything in the conference of the Elders unless some ignorance that might be injurious or a matter which it is important to know leads you to ask a question. Some who are puffed up with vainglory, pretend that they ask, in order really to show off the knowledge which they possess. It is impossible for one, who takes to the pursuit of reading with the purpose of gaining the praise of men, to be rewarded with the gift of true knowledge. One, who is bound by the chain of this passion, is sure to be also in bondage to other faults, and especially to that of pride. If he is baffled by his encounter with practical and ethical knowledge, he will certainly not attain that spiritual knowledge which springs from it. Be then in all things ‘swift to hear, but slow to speak’ (James 1:19), lest there come upon you that which is noted by Solomon, ‘If you see a man who is quick to speak, know that there is more hope for a fool than for him’ (Proverbs 29:20). Do not presume to teach anyone in words what you have not already performed in deed.”

The Righteousness of God

What does “The Righteousness of God” mean? Paul stated, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. There is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:21-23). Paul continued, “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Regarding the Jewish leaders, Paul said, “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). James summarized the situation: “The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). Paul describes our rational response to God: “Do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:13).

Thus the Righteousness of God comes by faith, but there is a responsibility on our part to show the fruit of our righteousness by our deeds. As a result of this Gift of God, we are His inheritance (Ephesians 1:18) and we are seated with Christ on the Throne of God (Ephesians 2:6). It is difficult for us to comprehend the enormity of what Christ has done for us, and the tendency is to just slough it off as unimportant. The Mosaic Law has not been discarded; it still serves a useful purpose, but not the purpose it used to serve. Those who try to live by the Mosaic Law exclusively never attain to the Righteousness of God, and will have problems at Judgment Day.

John Chrysostom outlined²⁹⁴ briefly the declaring of the Righteousness of God. It is like Christ declaring His riches, His life or His power. We shouldn't doubt or shun it; just accept it.

What does it mean to demonstrate His righteousness? (Romans 3:25) Like the demonstrating of His riches, not only for Him to be rich Himself, but also to make others rich! Or like the demonstrating of life, not only that He is Himself living, but also that He makes the dead to live! Or like the demonstrating of His power, not only that He is Himself powerful, but also that He makes the feeble powerful. So also is the demonstrating of His righteousness; not only that He is Himself righteous, but that He also makes them that are filled with the putrefying sores of sin suddenly righteous. In explaining this ‘demonstrating’, Paul has added, ‘That He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’ (Romans 3:26). Don't doubt then; it is not of works, but of faith. Don't shun the righteousness of God, for it is a blessing in two ways; because it is easy, and also open to all men. Don't be bashful and shamefaced! If He Himself openly demonstrates Himself to do something, and He finds a delight and a pride in it, how can we be dejected and hide our face at what our Master glories in?

Chrysostom also described²⁹⁵ the enormity of what Christ did at the Cross and how great is the righteousness of God. Christ didn't just die for our sin; He who knew no sin, who was righteousness itself, was made to be sin. He didn't just die on the Cross; He was both cursed and disgraced also. The result of this is that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

²⁹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, vv. 24-25.

²⁹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XI, 5.

“What has Christ done? ‘He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Had He achieved nothing but done only this, think how great a thing it were to give His Son for those that had outraged Him. He has not only achieved mighty things, but besides, He has allowed Him that did no wrong to be punished for those who had done wrong. But Paul did not say this; he mentioned something which is far greater than this. ‘Him that knew no sin’, he says, Him that was righteousness itself, ‘He made sin’; that is, He allowed Christ to be condemned as a sinner, as one cursed to die. ‘Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’ (Galatians 3:13). To die thus was far greater than just to die; and this he also implied, ‘He became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross’ (Philippians 2:8). This thing carried with it not only punishment, but also disgrace. Reflect therefore how great things He bestowed on us. A great thing indeed it was for even a sinner to die for anyone; but He who underwent this was both righteous and died for sinners. Not only did He die, but even as one cursed; and not as cursed only does He die, but thereby freely bestowing upon us those great goods which we never looked for. He says, that ‘we might become the righteousness of God in Him’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). What words, what thought shall be adequate to realize these things? ‘For the righteous’, ‘He made a sinner; that He might make the sinners righteous’. Rather, he didn’t say even this, but what was far greater; for the word he employed is not the habit, but the quality itself. He didn’t say ‘made’ Him a sinner, but ‘made Him sin’; not ‘Him that had not sinned’ only, but ‘that had not even known sin’. He did this that we ‘might become’, he did not say ‘righteous’, but, ‘righteousness’, and, ‘the righteousness of God’. This is the righteousness ‘of God’, when we are justified not by works, in which case it were necessary that not a spot even should be found, but by grace, in which case all sin is done away. At the same time it doesn’t allow us to be lifted up, seeing the whole is the free gift of God; this teaches us also the greatness of that which is given. That which was before was a righteousness of the Law and of works, but this is ‘the righteousness of God’”.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated²⁹⁶ that Jesus did not call the Mosaic Law “commandments of men”; that referred to the traditions of the Jewish leaders. As a result, they were ignorant of and did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.

“Jesus said to His disciples, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers’ (Matthew 23:2-4). He therefore did not throw blame on the Law that was given by Moses, when He exhorted it to be observed, before Jerusalem was destroyed. But He *did* throw blame upon those persons, because they repeated indeed the words of the Law, yet were without love. For this reason were they held as being unrighteous as respects God, and as respects their neighbor. As Isaiah says, ‘These people draw near to me with their mouth, and they honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worship me, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men’ (Isaiah 29:13 LXX). He does not call the Law given by Moses commandments of men, but the

²⁹⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xii, 4.

traditions of the elders themselves which they had invented; in upholding this they made the Law of God of no effect, and were on this account also not subject to His Word. This is what Paul says concerning these men, ‘For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. Christ *is* the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Romans 10:3-4). How is Christ the end of the Law, if He is not also the final Cause of it? He who has brought in the end, has Himself also wrought the beginning. It is He who Himself said to Moses, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people that is in Egypt, and I have come down to deliver them’ (Exodus 3:7-8 LXX). It was customary from the beginning with the Word of God to ascend and descend for the purpose of saving those who were in affliction.”

John Chrysostom stated²⁹⁷ that the Jewish leaders never achieved the righteousness of the Law; and since they did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God, they had nothing. This was their own fault, and happened due to pride, wickedness, and unkindness.

“How did the Gentiles surpass the Jews in godliness? And how did such blindness come upon the Jews? Listen to Paul explain it; he searched exactly into these things, and didn’t cease until he had found the cause, and had declared it to all others. (1 Corinthians 9:17) ‘They (the Jews), being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God’ (Romans 10:3). Therefore they have suffered this. Again, explaining the same matter in other terms, he says, ‘What shall we say then? The Gentiles, who didn’t follow after righteousness, have attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the Law of righteousness, has not attained to the Law of righteousness. Why? Because they didn’t seek it by faith! They stumbled at that stumbling stone’ (Romans 9:32). His meaning is this: ‘These men’s unbelief has been the cause of their misfortunes, and their haughtiness was parent of their unbelief’. Having before enjoyed greater privileges than the heathen, through having received the Law, through knowing God, and the rest which Paul enumerates, the Jews after the coming of Christ saw the heathen and themselves called on equal terms through faith. After faith received one of the circumcision in nothing preferred to the Gentile, they came to envy and were stung by their haughtiness, and could not endure the unspeakable and exceeding loving-kindness of the Lord. This has happened to them from nothing else but pride, wickedness, and unkindness.”

Tertullian stated²⁹⁸ that the Righteousness of God refers to the judgment that we will undergo as recompense for our deeds. Even the great Apostle Paul did not feel that he had yet arrived at the hope of righteousness.

“Concerning our expectation and hope Paul writes to the Galatians: ‘We through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith’ (Galatians 5:5). He says, ‘we wait for it’, not that we are in possession of it. By the righteousness of God, he means that judgment which we shall have to undergo as the recompense *of our deeds*. It is in expectation of this for himself that he writes,

²⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IX, 1.

²⁹⁸ Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 23.

‘If by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected’ (Philippians 3:11-12). He had believed, and had known all mysteries, as an elect vessel and the *great* teacher of the Gentiles. But for all that he goes on to say, ‘I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me’ (Philippians 3:12). Actually more: ‘Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended’” (Philippians 3:13)

What We Must Do

James said, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion *is* useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

Doers, not just Hearers of the Word

Paul said the same thing as James: “not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (Romans 2:13). We must actually do what we say we believe or we become hypocrites.

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁹⁹ that knowing what to do isn’t good enough; we must actually do it to become doers of the Word.

“If we know what to do, happy are we if we do them. But to know what to do is not enough. For Scripture says, ‘Not the hearers of the Law, but the doers of a Law will be justified’ (Romans 2:13). Knowledge itself condemns, when it is without action and deeds of virtue. Therefore that we may escape the condemnation, let us follow after the practice, that we may obtain those good things that are promised to us, by the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

John Cassian pointed out³⁰⁰ that doers of the Word are promised admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, there comes a time when one cannot do these things anymore, such as due to physical infirmity in old age. The reward for doing them does not go away however.

“The Lord Himself promises the reward of the kingdom of heaven to works, when He said, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, etc.’ (Matthew 25:34-35). Will the effort of fasting, diligence in reading, works of mercy, justice, piety, and kindness be taken away from us, and not continue with the doers of them? If so how shall these works be taken away, when they admit the doers of them into the kingdom of heaven?”

“The reward for a good work will not be taken away, as the Lord Himself says: ‘Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name

²⁹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, V, v. 3.

³⁰⁰ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Moses, I, I, 9-10.

of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward' (Matthew 10:42). But the doing of a thing, which either bodily necessity, or the onslaught of the flesh, or the inequalities of this world compel to be done, will be taken away. Diligence in reading and self-denial in fasting are usefully practiced for purifying the heart and chastening the flesh in this life only, as long as 'the flesh lusts against the spirit' (Galatians 5:17). Sometimes we see that even in this life they are taken away from those men who are worn out with excessive labor, bodily infirmity or old age, and cannot be practiced by them."

John Chrysostom illustrated³⁰¹ how Jesus convicted the Jewish leaders that they were not doers of the Word, but the Gentiles were. He used their own words to convict them.

"Jesus convicted the Jewish leaders by a parable, intimating both their unreasonable obstinacy, and the submissiveness of those who were utterly condemned by them (the Gentiles). These two children in the parable declare what came to pass with respect to the Gentiles and the Jews. The Gentiles did not undertake to obey, were not hearers of the Law, but showed their obedience in their works. The Jews said, 'All things that God has spoken, we will do, and we will listen to' (Exodus 19:8 LXX), but in their works were disobedient. For this reason, that they might not think the Law would benefit them, He shows that this same thing condemns them, like Paul also said, 'Not the hearers of the Law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified' (Romans 2:13). That He might make them self-condemned, He causes the judgment to be delivered by themselves, like He does also in the ensuing parable of the vineyard" (Matthew 21:33-44).

Cyprian of Carthage stated³⁰² that what we do does not follow present glory but future glory. As we do good works, we need to be patient to allow the fruit of our works to develop, especially to the household of faith.

"If hope and faith may attain their result, there is need of patience. We are not following after present glory, but future, according to what Paul warns us, 'We were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance' (Romans 8:24-25). Therefore, waiting and patience are needful, that we may fulfill that which we have begun to be, and may receive that which we believe and hope for, according to God's own showing. Moreover, Paul also instructs the righteous, the doers of good works, and those who lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, that they also should be patient. He teaches them, 'Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith'" (Galatians 6:9-10).

John Cassian stated³⁰³ that as Judge, God considers the purpose and aim of what we do. He considers the inner goodness of the heart and the disposition of the doer. One man may be justified by telling a lie and another may be condemned for telling the truth. He lists examples from the Scriptures.

³⁰¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 2.

³⁰² Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IX, 13.

³⁰³ John Cassian, 2nd Conference of Abbot Joseph, II, xvii, 17 & 20.

“God is not only the Judge and inspector of our words and actions, but He also looks into their purpose and aim. If He sees that anything has been done or promised by someone for the sake of eternal salvation and shows insight into Divine contemplation, He looks at the inner goodness of the heart and regards the desire of the will rather than the actual words spoken. He takes into account the aim of the work and the disposition of the doer. One man may be justified by means of a lie, while another may be guilty of a sin of everlasting death by telling the truth. The patriarch Jacob was not afraid to imitate the hairy appearance of his brother’s body by wrapping himself up in skins, and to his credit acquiesced in his mother’s instigation of a lie for this object. He saw that in this way there would be bestowed on him greater gains of blessing and righteousness than by keeping to the path of simplicity. He did not doubt that the stain of this lie would at once be washed away by the flood of the paternal blessing, and would speedily be dissolved like a little cloud by the breath of the Holy Spirit. Richer rewards of merit would be bestowed on him by means of this fraud which he put on than by means of the truth.”

“Doeg the Edomite told nothing but the truth, when he told Saul, ‘I saw the son of Jesse in Nob, with Ahimelech the son of Ahitub the priest, who consulted the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine’ (1 Samuel 22:9-23). For this true story he was condemned. It is said of him by the prophet: ‘God shall destroy you forever, pluck you up and tear you out of your tabernacle, and your root from the land of the living’ (Psalm 52:1-5). He then for showing the truth is forever plucked and rooted up out of that land in which the harlot Rahab with her family is planted for her lie. We remember that Samson most injuriously betrayed to his wicked wife the truth which he had hidden for a long time by a lie; the truth so inconsiderately disclosed was the cause of his own deception, because he had neglected to keep the command of the prophet, ‘Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom’” (Micah 7:5).

The Law of Liberty

James said, “He who looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

We are given considerable freedom in what we do. Thus the word of God that we received is called “The Law of Liberty”. But exactly what is meant by “The Law of Liberty”?

Irenaeus of Lyons referred³⁰⁴ to the Law of Liberty as the word of God that was preached by the Apostles. This was the Law that went forth from Jerusalem that caused the Gentiles to beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning hooks. The plows and pruning hooks are the Creation of man beginning with Adam. Christ joined the beginning to the end by fixing the iron to the wood in His Incarnation, joining man to God through the Cross.

“From the Lord’s advent, the new covenant which brings back peace, and the Law which gives life, has gone forth over the whole earth. As the prophets said, ‘Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and He shall rebuke many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither

³⁰⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, IV, xxxiv, 4.

shall they learn war anymore' (Isaiah 2:4). If another Law and word, going forth from Jerusalem, brought in such a reign of peace among the Gentiles which received the Word, and convinced, through them, many a nation of its folly, then it appears that the prophets spoke of some other person. The Law of liberty, that is, the word of God, preached by the Apostles who went forth from Jerusalem throughout all the earth, caused such a change in the state of things, that these nations formed their swords and war-lances into ploughshares, and changed them into pruning-hooks for reaping grain. That is, they converted them into instruments used for peaceful purposes, and they are now unaccustomed to fighting; when struck, they offer also the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). The prophets have not spoken these things of any other person, but of Him who effected them. This person is our Lord, and in Him is that declaration borne out; since it is He Himself who has made the plough, and introduced the pruning-hook, that is, the first introduction of man, which was the creation exhibited in Adam, and the gathering in of the produce in the last times by the Word. For this reason, since He joined the beginning to the end, and is the Lord of both, He has finally displayed the plough, in that the wood has been joined on to the iron, and has thus cleansed His land. The Word has been firmly united to flesh, and in its mechanism fixed with pins; He has reclaimed the savage earth. In the beginning, He figured the pruning-hook by means of Abel, pointing out that there should be a gathering in of a righteous race of men. He said, 'See how the just man has perished, and no one lays *it* to heart; and righteous men are taken away, and no one considers it' (Isaiah 57:1 LXX). These things were acted beforehand in Abel; they were also previously declared by the prophets, but were accomplished in the Lord's person. The same is still true with regard to us, the body following the example of the Head."

John of Damascus stated³⁰⁵ that the Law of Liberty carries forward into eternity after bodily servitude comes to an end.

"We desire to cease from sin and devote ourselves to the service of God. But our body, like a beast of burden, hinders us; so we urge it forward. These are the things which the spiritual Law of Christ enjoins on us and those who observe that become superior to the Law of Moses. When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When the covering of the Law, that is, the veil, is torn apart through the crucifixion of the Savior, and the Spirit shines forth with tongues of fire, the letter shall be done away with, bodily things shall come to an end, the Law of servitude shall be fulfilled, and the Law of liberty shall be bestowed on us. We shall celebrate the perfect rest of human nature the day after the resurrection, on which the Lord Jesus, the Author of Life and our Savior, shall lead us into the heritage promised to those who serve God in the spirit. The heritage into which He entered Himself as our forerunner, and where the gates of Heaven are opened to Him, He took His seat in bodily form at the right hand of the Father, where those who keep the spiritual Law shall also come."

³⁰⁵ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 23.

Irenaeus of Lyons stated³⁰⁶ that those who refused to come to the marriage supper cannot say that God is at fault. They have apostatized from the light and transgressed the Law of Liberty; their imperfection is their own fault.

“If we will not believe in Him, and flee from His hands, the cause of our imperfection shall be in us who didn’t obey, and not in Him who called us. He commissioned messengers to call people to the marriage, but those who did not obey Him deprived themselves of the royal supper. The skill of God is not defective; He has power over the stones to raise up children to Abraham. The man who does not obtain it is himself the cause of his own imperfection. In like manner, the light doesn’t fail because of those who have blinded themselves; while it remains the same as ever, those who are blinded are involved in darkness through their own fault. The light never enslaves anyone by necessity; God does not exert compulsion on anyone unwilling to accept the exercise of His skill. Those persons, who have apostatized from the light given by the Father, and transgressed the Law of liberty, have done so through their own fault; they have been created free agents, and possess power over themselves.”

How the Mosaic Law Fits

James said, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place’, and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’, or, ‘Sit here at my footstool’, have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble Name by which you are called?”

“If you really fulfill *the* royal Law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’, you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the Law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery’, also said, ‘Do not murder’. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the Law of liberty. Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

While we live under the “Law of Liberty”, we have not completely abandoned the Mosaic Law, and the Mosaic Law is very useful to us, especially for young and weak Christians, as a guideline until he attains maturity. Some specific examples follow. As John Chrysostom stated³⁰⁷, the Mosaic and the Grace of God are not adversaries:

“The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. For if it confines those who ought to go forward to Grace, then it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day,

³⁰⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, [Against Heresies](#), IV, xxxix, 3.

³⁰⁷ John Chrysostom, [Commentary on Galatians](#), Chapter 3

from the sun, it would not only cease to benefit us, but would injure us. And so does the Law if it stands between the greater benefits of Grace and us. Just so a *pedagogue* or tutor makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure”.

Partiality

James is merely reflecting the Mosaic Law regarding partiality. “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:15). “You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute” (Exodus 23:3). “You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous” (Deuteronomy 16:19).

This aspect of the Mosaic Law was incorporated into the Christian Faith by the Apostles. “Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’” (Acts 10:34). “I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21). “To those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness -- indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:8-11).

John Chrysostom noted³⁰⁸ how Paul charged Timothy to be completely impartial in ordaining Bishops in the Church. Paul called on God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the angels as witnesses that things be done right.

“I charge *you* before God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality’ (1 Timothy 5:21). Thus Paul fearfully charges him. Though Timothy was his beloved son, he did not stand in awe of him. He was not ashamed to say of himself, ‘Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified’ (1 Corinthians 9:27); much less would he be afraid or ashamed in the case of Timothy. He called the Father and the Son to witness. But why the elect Angels? From great moderation; as Moses said, ‘I call heaven and earth to witness’ (Deuteronomy 4:26); and again, ‘Hear, O you mountains, the Lord’s complaint, and you strong foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a complaint against His people’ (Micah 6:2). He calls the Father and the Son to witness what he has said, making his appeal to Them against that future Day, that if anything should be done that ought not to be done, he was clear from the guilt of it.”

“That you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality’ (1 Timothy 5:21). That is, that you deal impartially and equally between those who are upon trial and are to be judged by you, that no one may pre-occupy your mind or gain you over to his side beforehand. But who are the elect Angels? It is because there are some not elect. Jacob calls to witness God and the heap (Genesis 31:45); so we often take at once superior and inferior persons to witness;

³⁰⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Timothy, XVI, vv. 21-23.

so great a thing is testimony. Paul was thus saying, ‘I call to witness God, His Son and His servants that I have charged you; so before them I charge you.’”

Vincent of Lerins cautioned³⁰⁹ that visitors other than prophets and bishops should remain impartial in the Church they are visiting.

“Unless a man is a prophet or a spiritual person, that is, a master in spiritual matters let him be as observant as possible of impartiality and unity. He should prefer neither his own opinions to those of everyone, nor to recede from the belief of the whole body.”

Tertullian stated³¹⁰ that God, in His impartiality, sends dreams to the just and to the unjust. As a result, most of mankind gets their knowledge of God from dreams.

“Dreams are inflicted on us mainly by demons, although they sometimes turn out true and favorable to us. When, however, with the deliberate aim after evil, they assume a flattering and captivating style, they show themselves proportionately vain, deceitful, obscure, wanton, and impure. No wonder! The images partake of the character of the realities. God has promised, ‘to pour out the grace of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, and has ordained that His servants and His handmaids should see visions as well as utter prophecies’ (Joel 2:28). Therefore all those visions must be regarded as emanating from Him; this may be compared to the actual grace of God, as being honest, holy, prophetic, inspired, instructive, inviting to virtue, the bountiful nature of which causes them to overflow even to the profane. God, with grand impartiality, ‘makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matthew 5:45). It was by an inspiration from God that Nebuchadnezzar dreamt his dreams; and almost the greater part of mankind gets their knowledge of God from dreams. As the mercy of God super-abounds to the heathen, so the temptation of the evil one encounters the saints, from whom he never withdraws his malignant efforts to steal over them as best he may in their very sleep, if unable to assault them when they are awake. Another class of dreams consists of those which the soul itself apparently creates for itself from an intense application of special circumstances.”

John Chrysostom stated³¹¹ that the man born blind maintained his impartiality when questioned by the Jewish leaders. He kept himself free from suspicion; his testimony was uncorrupted; and he did not speaking from partiality, but bore witness according to the fact. As a result the Jewish leaders could neither upset nor remove what had been done.

The Whole Law

James stated, “For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery’, also said, ‘Do not murder’. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the Law of liberty” (James 2:10-12).

³⁰⁹ Vincent of Lerins, Commonitory, XXVIII, 74.

³¹⁰ Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, I, ix, 47.

³¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LVIII, 2.

Christ fulfilled the whole Law to free us from the curse of having to keep it, but being unable to do so. Our part today is to love our brethren, since this in effect fulfills the whole Law. Today the whole Law is summarized in the Creeds of the Church as a concise statement of the Faith.

John Chrysostom stated³¹² that we were cursed for not continuing in or keeping the whole Law. Christ exchanged curses with us, since He had kept the whole Law; He became cursed by hanging on a tree so that we might not be cursed for our sins.

“Paul stated, ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’ (Galatians 3:13, Deuteronomy 21:23). In reality, the people were subject to another curse, ‘Cursed *is* the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law’ (Deuteronomy 27:26). To this curse people were subject, for no man had continued in, or was a keeper of the whole Law. But Christ exchanged this curse for the other, ‘Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree’. Both he who hangs on a tree and he who transgresses the Law is cursed. As it was necessary for him who is about to relieve from a curse himself to be free from it, but to receive another instead of it, therefore Christ took upon Him such another, and thereby relieved us from the curse. It was like an innocent man’s undertaking to die for another sentenced to death, and so rescuing him from punishment. Christ took upon Him not the curse of transgression, but the other curse, in order to remove that of others. For, ‘He had done no violence neither was any deceit in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22). By dying He rescued from death those who were dying; so by taking upon Himself the curse, He delivered them from it.”

John Chrysostom outlined³¹³ the effects of the whole Law: God made promises to Abraham, but the transgression of the Law deprived us of the promises. Therefore Christ came to fulfill the whole Law, to free us from the curse of the transgression and to make us fit to receive the promises.

“There had been a promise made to Abraham, ‘To your descendants I will give this land, and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed’ (Genesis 12:7; 22:18). But after this, they of the seed of Abraham all became subject to punishment. The Law brought wrath to them by being transgressed, and deprived them of that promise made to the fathers. Therefore the Son came in order that those promises might come true. Having fulfilled the whole Law, in which He also fulfilled the circumcision, He freed them from the curse of the transgression, and He didn’t allow this promise to fall to the ground. When Paul calls Christ ‘a servant to the circumcision’ (Romans 15:8), he means that by having come, fulfilled the Law, been circumcised, and born of the seed of Abraham, He undid the curse, stayed the anger of God, and made those that were to receive the promises fit for them, as being once for all freed from their alienation. It was not that the Law might continue, but that He might put an end to it, free us from its curse, and set us entirely at liberty from the dominion of that Law. It was because we had transgressed the Law, that He fulfilled it. It was not that we might fulfill it, but that He might confirm to us the promises made to the fathers, which the Law had caused

³¹² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3, Verse 13.

³¹³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXVIII, v. 8.

to be suspended, by showing us to have offended, and to be unworthy of the inheritance. So we are saved by grace, since we were cast off. Don't bicker or perversely cling to the Law at this unsuitable time, since it would have cast us out of the promise. Christ suffered so many things, not because we were deserving of salvation, but that God might be true."

Chrysostom also pointed out³¹⁴ Paul's words to the effect that love between members of the Body of Christ fulfills the whole Law. This is a debt that we always owe because we are members of one another. This is an intense love and it is equal to our love for God! As we love our brethren, we also love God.

"Paul said, 'Owe no one anything except to love one another' (Romans 13:8). This is the mother of good deeds, and the instructress of the things spoken of, and is also productive of every virtue. This is a debt also, not tribute or custom, but a continuous debt. This is the character of the debt that one keeps giving and owing always. Having said how we ought to love, he also shows the profit from it, saying, 'He that loves another has fulfilled the Law' (Romans 13:8). Do not consider this a favor; it is a debt. We owe love to our brother through our spiritual relationship. Not for this only, but also because 'we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another' (Romans 12:5). If love leaves us, the whole body is torn to pieces. Therefore love our brothers! If from his friendship we gain so much as to fulfill the whole Law, we owe him love as being benefited by him."

"Paul does not seek any kind of love, but intense love. He does not say merely 'love our neighbor' but, 'as our self'. Christ said that 'the Law and the Prophets hang upon' it. Christ described two kinds of love! After saying that the first commandment is, 'You shall love the Lord your God', He added a second; and He added, 'like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:36-39). What can be equal to this love to man, or this gentleness? When we were at infinite distance from Him, He brings the love between men into comparison with that toward Himself, and says that 'it is like this'".

"Paul said, 'Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law' (Romans 13:10). Observe how it has both virtues, abstinence from evils (for it 'does no harm', he says), and the working of good deeds. 'It is the fulfilling (or filling up) of the Law'; not bringing before us instruction only on moral duties in a concise form, but making the accomplishment of them easy also. That we should become acquainted with things profitable to us was not all that Paul was careful about; the doing of them brought us great assistance. Love accomplished not some part of the commandments, but the whole sum of virtue in us. Let us then love one another, since in this way we shall also love God, Who loves us."

John Cassian stated³¹⁵ that the Creeds of the Church are a collection in a few words of the Faith of the Church giving the force of the whole Law. These provide for the carelessness and ignorance of some of his children, that no mind however simple and ignorant might have any trouble over what could so easily be retained in the memory.

³¹⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXIII, vv. 8-10.

³¹⁵ John Cassian, Seven Books on the Incarnation, VI, 3.

Without Mercy

James said, “For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery’, also said, ‘Do not murder’. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the Law of liberty. Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment!” (James 2:10-13)

There are two facets to judgment without mercy. One has to do with the negative: what happens if we despise the Law or trample underfoot the Son of God. Another has to do with how we can seek out the mercy of God by our compassion to others.

Trampling Underfoot the Son of God

There are many occasions in the Scriptures where someone was shown to be unworthy of the grace of God for some reason.

John Chrysostom pointed out³¹⁶ some of the details of different punishments for similar sins depending on who, when and how much the person knew. In some cases, the sinner died without mercy with the testimony of two or three witnesses. The severest penalties were given to a priest or a member of his family who sinned.

Not all sins incur the same punishments, but many and diverse, according to the times, according to the persons, according to their rank, according to their understanding, and according to other things besides. As an example, let one sin be set forth, fornication; note how many different punishments I find not from myself, but from the divine Scriptures. Did anyone commit fornication before the Law, he is differently punished; and this Paul shows, ‘As many as have sinned without Law will also perish without Law’. Did anyone commit fornication after the Law? He shall suffer more grievous things. ‘As many as have sinned in the Law will be judged by the Law’ (Romans 2:12). Did anyone commit fornication being a priest; he receives from his dignity a very great addition to his punishment. So for this case, whereas the other women were slain for fornication, the daughters of the priests were burned (Leviticus 21:9); the lawgiver showing more amply, how great punishment awaits the priest if he commits this sin. If on the daughter he inflicts a greater punishment, because of her being a priest’s daughter, much more on the man himself who bears the priest’s office. Was fornication committed with any violence? She is even freed from punishment (Deuteronomy 22:25-26). Did one play the harlot being rich, and another being poor? Here again also is a difference. This is evident concerning David; similarly anyone guilty of fornication after Christ’s coming. Should he depart uninitiated³¹⁷, he will suffer a punishment worse than all those. Was any guilty of fornication after the laver? In this case not even a consolation is left for the sin any more. This same thing Paul declared when he said, ‘Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the

³¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXV, 5.

³¹⁷ Initiation referred to a sequence of instruction leading up to being deemed worthy of the Mysteries (the Lord’s Table). The “laver” referred to the washing of Baptism.

blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?’ (Hebrews 10:28-29) Has any been guilty of fornication, bearing the priest’s office now? This above all is the crown of the evil deeds.

Do you see of one sin how many different forms of punishment? One punishment fits that before the Law, another after the Law, another for him who bears the priest’s office. One punishment fits the rich woman; another fits the poor woman; another fits her that is a catechumen, or a believing woman; still another fits the daughter of the priest. From the knowledge again great is the difference; ‘That servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*’ (Luke 12:47).

Chrysostom also pointed out³¹⁸ how a man who despised the Law of Mercy died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses; and the same is true under the New Covenant if we trample the Son of God underfoot. Our sins are like worms that were killed and buried at Baptism; if we continue in the passions and breed more worms, we have no excuse.

“It is no advantage to a Christian to have faith, and the gift of baptism, and yet be open to all the passions. In that way the disgrace is greater, and the shame more. Someone who has the diadem and the purple is so far from gaining by this dress any honor to himself, that he disgraces the clothing by his own shame; so the believer also, who leads a corrupt life, is so far from becoming an object of respect, that he is only the more one of scorn. ‘For as many’, Paul says, ‘as sinned without Law, will also perish without Law and as many as have sinned in the Law, will be judged by the Law’ (Romans 2:12). Paul also says, ‘Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot?’ (Hebrews 10:28-29). This is reasonable also. I placed (God might say) all the passions in subjection to you by baptism. How then is it that you have disgraced so great a gift, and have become one thing instead of another? I have killed and buried your former transgressions, like worms; how is it that you have bred others? Sins are worse than worms, since worms harm to the body, sins harm the soul; and sins make the more offensive stench. Yet we don’t notice it, and so we are in no hurry to purge them out. Thus the drunkard doesn’t know how disgusting the stale wine is, but he that is not drunken has a distinct perception of it. So with sins also, he that lives soberly knows thoroughly that other mire. But he that gives himself up to wickedness, like a man made drowsy with drunkenness, does not even know the fact that he is sick.”

Chrysostom further explained³¹⁹ why there was a threat of no mercy under certain conditions. If the Law of Moses was so severe for rejecting its commands, trampling the Son of God and insulting the Holy Spirit is worse. Chrysostom stated that these arguments are referring to the Lord’s Table.

“‘Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses’ (Hebrews 10:28). ‘Without mercy’ means that there is no pardon, no pity although the Law is of Moses; for Moses ordained the most of

³¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XI, v. 18.

³¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XX, 3.

it. What is ‘on the testimony of two or three’? If two or three bore witness, he means, they immediately suffered punishment.”

“If then under the Old Covenant, when the Law of Moses is rejected, there is so great punishment, ‘Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?’” (Hebrews 10:29)

“How does a man ‘trample the Son of God underfoot’? When partaking of Him in the mysteries and he has sinned, has he not trampled Him under foot? Has he not despised Him? Just as we make no account of those who are trampled under foot so also, they who sin have made no account of Christ; and so they have sinned. We have become the Body of Christ; if we give ourselves to the devil, so that he tramples us under foot, we sin.”

“How do we count the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified a common thing? What is ‘common’? It is ‘unclean’, or the having nothing beyond other things, ‘And insulted the Spirit of grace’. He that doesn’t accept a benefit insults the benefactor. He made us a son; and we wish to become a slave. He came to dwell with us; and we bring in wicked imaginations to Him. Christ wished to stay with us; and we trample Him down by overeating, by drunkenness.”

“Let us listen, whoever partakes of the mysteries unworthily; let us listen, whoever approaches that Table unworthily. ‘Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample you under their feet’ (Matthew 7:6); that is, lest they despise.”

Seeking Out the Mercy of God

There is a reciprocal relationship between the mercy of God and what we do. The more merciful we are, the more mercy will be shown to us. Showing mercy to our brethren demonstrates our Faith, and we are rewarded for this by God as He shows mercy to us in our lives.

John Chrysostom noted³²⁰ that there are things that we can do that attract the grace of God. If we make it a practice of showing mercy to our neighbor, God will make it a practice of showing mercy to us. This is similar to what we say in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:2-4).

“It is great when we do things worthy of mercy, and do not render ourselves unworthy. When we go to the priest for confession of sins, and he says to us, ‘The Lord will have mercy on you, my son’, do not confide in the word only, but add also works. Do acts worthy of mercy; God will bless us, if we do things worthy of blessing. He will bless us, if we show mercy to our neighbor. For the things which we wish to obtain from God, of those we ought first to impart to our neighbors. But if we deprive our neighbors of them, how can we wish to obtain them? ‘Blessed’, He says, ‘are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy’ (Matthew 5:7). If men show mercy to such, much more will God; but to the unmerciful, by no means. ‘Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment!’” (James 2:13).

³²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philemon, III, Moral.

“An excellent thing is mercy! Why then have we not done it to one another? Do we wish to be pardoned, when we offend? Why then do we not yourself pardon him who has offended us? We come to God asking of Him the kingdom of heaven, and we ourselves do not give money when it is begged of us. For this cause we do not obtain mercy, because we do not show mercy. But why, we say; isn’t it also a part of mercy, to show mercy to the unmerciful, like us? No! He that treated with the greatest kindness the hard-hearted cruel man, that had done numberless evils to his neighbor, how should He be merciful to him? What then, we say? Has not the Laver saved us, who had committed infinite evils? It has delivered us from them, not that we should commit them again, but that we may not commit them. For ‘how shall we’, Paul said, ‘who died to sin live any longer in it?’” (Romans 6:2)

Chrysostom also spoke³²¹ about the effects of delaying Baptism, and about falling into sin after Baptism; both have serious side effects. Delaying Baptism also delays the effects of any good works that we may do; we may end this life without ever having accepted God’s grace or done anything good. Those who sin after Baptism are punished more severely than catechumens. We are exalted to the highest honor by the Gift of God; if we don’t have the will to labor out of gratitude, what forgiveness can we deserve?

“We have spoken on purpose that having received Baptism, people may continue in temperance and much moderation, not that many might be deterred from receiving baptism. ‘But I am afraid,’ someone might say. If you were afraid, you would have received and guarded it. ‘No,’ he might say, ‘but this is the reason why I do not receive it, that I am frightened.’ Are you not afraid to depart this life in this condition? ‘God is merciful,’ one might say. Receive baptism then, because He is merciful and ready to help. We think of this only when we want to. This is especially the time to resort to God’s mercy; we shall be surest of obtaining it, when we do our part. He that has cast the whole matter on God, and sins after his baptism (as being man it is likely), and repents, shall obtain mercy. He that delays acceptance of God’s mercy, and departs this life with no portion in that grace, shall have his punishment without a word to be said for him. If someone delays Baptism, he may depart empty of all good works. It is impossible, in my opinion, that the man who had such hopes yet dallied with baptism should have done anything generous and good. Why do we presume upon the uncertain chance of the future? Why not convert this fear into labor and earnestness; we shall be great and admirable! Which is best, to fear or to labor? Suppose someone gave you a tottering house, saying, ‘Watch out for the decaying roof to fall on your head; perhaps it will fall, perhaps not. If you had rather it should not fall, then work and inhabit a more secure apartment. Which would you rather choose; that idle condition accompanied with fear or labor with confidence? The uncertain future is like a decayed house, ever threatening to fall; but this work, laborious though it is, ensures safety.”

“God forbid that we should fall into so great difficulty as to sin after baptism. However, even if anything like this should happen, God is merciful, and has given us many ways for obtaining remission even after this. Just as those who sin after baptism are punished more severely than the Catechumens, so again, those who know that there are medicines in repentance, and yet will not make use of

³²¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, I, vv. 1-2.

them, will undergo a more grievous chastisement. In proportion to how much the mercy of God is enlarged, by so much does the punishment increase, if we do not profit by that mercy. We were full of grievous evils and suddenly we became a friend of God, and were exalted to the highest honor, not by labors of our own, but by the gift of God. Suppose we again return to our former misconduct, and though we deserve to be severely punished, nevertheless, God gave unnumbered opportunities for salvation, whereby we may yet become a friend of God. If we don't have the will to labor, what forgiveness can we deserve? Will not the Gentiles with good reason deride us as a worthless drone?"