

THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE

November 24, 2019
23rd Sunday after Pentecost
Revision D

Epistle: Ephesians 2:4-10

Today’s Epistle lesson is used in the West on either the 6th Sunday after Pentecost or the 4th Sunday of Lent. The lesson teaches us that God’s love leads to salvation by grace. Earlier Paul describes the high, heavenly calling we have in Christ, brought about by divine power through His Resurrection and Ascension (Ephesians 1). Here he goes into this further, pointing out our own ascent from being children of wrath, deserving of hell (Ephesians 2:3) to the heights of heaven in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). There are many aspects of this that the Church Fathers spoke about, and there is a great depth to it.

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What Are the Heavenly Places?

Paul speaks of “us sitting together in the heavenly places¹ in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). When do we do that? Is that just some vague spiritualizing or does that really happen? The context of Paul’s reference to “the Heavenly Places” is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23, 2:15); thus, the heavenly places must have some connection to the Body of Christ also. As the Body of Christ meets to worship her Lord, we meet around the Throne of God in the heavens and are joined by the holy angels and other members of the Body who have already fallen asleep. Thus, for a short while, we step “out of time” and join the communion of saints in eternity – all in a mystery.

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¹ The Greek word “*epiraniou*”, literally “on or upon heaven”, is translated “in the heavenlies” or “in the heavenly places”.

In this process of salvation by Grace, we rise not just to some intermediate state, but all the way to Heaven (Ephesians 2:6). We actually are seated there right now, awaiting future eternal delight in radiant joy, fulfillment and beauty. [This makes misuse of our body² a more serious thing!] We begin to experience some of this even now in this life, especially as we meet the Lord in the Liturgy and partake of the Lord's Supper. Our Lord as a man, crucified, ascended and reigning, took our human nature into Heaven; the Father put all things under His feet for our sake (Hebrews 2:8, Matthew 28:18). We in the Church are joined to Him³ as His Body! (Ephesians 1:20-23).

This heavenly state is eternal, not just a passing spiritual high (Ephesians 2:7). As we meet to worship the Lord, we step into eternity while still in time. The "Kindness" of God, Who loves us, gives us this salvation not from our works, but from His mercy and grace (Titus 3:4-5). Yet what we can experience now is rather small compared to the exceeding riches He will show us for eternity.

There are other references to the goings-on in the heavenly places. The "heavenlies" seems to be a fairly broad term that includes both physical objects (planets, humans, Christ, Throne of God, demons, etc.) and spiritual things (future Kingdom, Eucharist, Tabernacle prototype, wickedness of demons, etc.)

Physical Objects:

- There are bodies (planets, stars, etc.) of the heavenlies and also earthly bodies (1 Corinthians 15:40).
- Christ is seated at the Right Hand of God in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:20).
- The Levitical priests served a copy and shadow of the heavenlies (Hebrews 8:5, 9:23).
- Abraham and Sarah sought a homeland, but they were strangers and pilgrims on earth. The better homeland that they sought is of the heavenlies (Hebrews 11:16).
- At the Name of Jesus, every knee will bow, those of the heavenlies, those of the earth and those under the earth (Philippians 2:10).

Spiritual Things:

- Nicodemus couldn't understand the earthly things Jesus spoke of, never mind what He said of the heavenlies (John 3:12).
- Christ is a man of the heavenlies. As we bear the image of His humanity in humility, we will also bear the image of the heavenlies (1 Corinthians 15:48-49).
- The Kingdom that we seek is of the heavenlies (2 Timothy 4:18), for our calling is of the heavenlies (Hebrews 3:1).
- The Eucharist is referred to a gift of the heavenlies (Hebrews 6:4).
- We have come to a Jerusalem that is of the heavenlies (Hebrews 12:22).
- The wisdom of God is made known by the Church to the principalities and powers of the heavenlies (Ephesians 3:10).

² If our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), and we are seated in the heavenlies with Christ, for us to willfully join Christ to a harlot or engage in other willful sin is a serious thing.

³ This will be covered more in the Epistle lesson for the 25th Sunday after Pentecost under the subject heading "Union with Christ" (Ephesians 4:1-16).

- We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against demons, the rulers of darkness and wickedness in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12).
- Our reward is every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (Ephesians 1:3), and we are seated together with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6).

The Magnitude of What Christ Has Done for Us

God's love is the basis of our transit from hell to heaven (Ephesians 2:4-5). God's love is expressed by His pity and mercy toward us sinners (Psalm 103:8-11), who were faced with certain death (Ephesians 2:1-2). God is rich in this mercy to all who seek Him, regardless of religious or ethnic background (Romans 10:12).

John Chrysostom stated⁴ that we sometimes don't appreciate what Christ has done for us. The body He gave us is beautifully formed, and He challenges us to make our soul beautiful also of our own free will.

“God has given us a body of earth, that we might carry it with us up to heaven, not that we should draw our soul down with it to earth. Earthy it is, but if we please, it may be heavenly. But we often concentrate all our focus on the things of this life, building large houses. How long are we to be nailed to these things? How long are we to be fastened to the earth, and grovel, like worms, in the dirt?”

“God has highly honored us, in committing to us so excellent a body. ‘I made heaven and earth’, He says, ‘and to you I give the power of creation’. Make your earth heaven! For it is in your power. ‘I am He that makes and transforms all things’ (Amos 5:8, LXX), said God of Himself. And He has given to men a similar power; just as a painter, being an affectionate father, teaches his own art to his son. ‘I formed your body beautiful’, he says, ‘but I give you the power of forming something better. Make your soul beautiful!’ I said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, and every fruitful tree’ (Genesis 1:11 paraphrase). You can also say, ‘Let this earth bring forth its proper fruit’, and what you want to produce will be produced. ‘I make the summer and the spring. I create the lightning and the wind’ (Amos 4:13 LXX; Psalm 74:17 LXX). I formed the dragon, that is, the devil, to play with him (Psalm 104:26). I have given you similar power. If you wish, you can play with him also, and bind him as you would a sparrow. I make the sun to rise upon the evil and the good; imitate Me by giving that which is yours to the good and to the evil. When mocked I bear with it and do good to those who mock Me; imitate Me, as you are able. I do good, with no expectation to be repaid; imitate Me in this also. I have illuminated bodies in the heavens. You can light others brighter than these, by enlightening those that are in error. For to know Me is a greater benefit than to look at the sun. You cannot create a man, but you can make him just and acceptable to God. I formed his substance; you can beautify his will. See how I love you and have given you the power in the greater things.”

We sit⁵ together with Christ in the heavens, where angels adore us in Him. He had emptied Himself of His glory in the Incarnation to become man and pursue us. He joins Himself to us in

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XV, v. 20.

⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XV, v. 20.

the Eucharist, and we become interwoven with Him as we partake. He asks that we imitate Him in all that He does.

“See how we are honored! Yet some are so unreasonable and so ungrateful as to say, ‘Why are we endowed with free will?’ If there had been no free will, we could not have imitated God. I rule Angels, God says, and so do you, through Him who is the First fruits (1 Corinthians 15:23). I sit on a royal throne, and you are seated with Me in Him who is the First fruits. As it is said, ‘He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:6). Through Him who is the First fruits, Cherubim and Seraphim adore you, with the entire heavenly host, including principalities and powers, thrones and dominions. Don’t slight your body, to which such high honors pertain; even the Bodiless Powers tremble at this.”

“Christ says to us, ‘It is not in this way only that I have shown My love to you, but also by what I have suffered. For you I was spit on and scourged. I emptied Myself of glory; I left My Father and came to you, who hate Me, turn from Me, and are loath to hear My Name. I pursued you; I ran after you, that I might overtake you. I joined you to Myself in the Eucharist, where you eat and drink Me. In heaven I hold you, and on earth I embrace you. Is it not enough for you that I have your First fruits above? Does this not satisfy your affection? I descended below; I am not only mingled with you, I am entwined in you. I am chewed (in the Eucharist), broken into minute particles, that the interspersion and union may be more complete. I am interwoven with you and I want there to be no more division between us. I will that we both be one”’.

Ambrose of Milan clarified⁶ some terms that are sometimes used very freely. Christ was in subjection when He bore our curses, but only in His humanity. He was never in subjection in His deity. When we sit in the heavenly places, we only do so in the person of Christ as partakers of the Divine Nature. Because of Christ’s humanity, He is said to be in us in subjection to the Father. Through His works and the virtues, as others begin to cling to God, then God becomes all and in all.

“Christ was made sin and a curse not on His own account but on ours. But He was not in subjection in His eternal Nature, nor accursed in His eternal Nature. ‘For cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deuteronomy 21:23). He was cursed, for He bore our curses; He was in subjection to the curse, but only in His humanity, not in the glory of God, for He took upon Him our subjection. While he makes Himself a partaker of our weakness in the flesh, He makes us partakers of the Divine Nature in His power. But neither in the one nor the other do we have any natural fellowship with the heavenly Generation of Christ, nor is there any subjection of the Godhead in Christ. But as Paul has said that on Him, through that flesh which is the pledge of our salvation, we sit in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), though certainly not sitting there ourselves. So also, He is said to be subject in us through the assumption of our nature.”

“A seat of honor, a seat of a heavenly and equal power, is not due to us at the right hand of God the Father. The Father only grants that to Christ according

⁶ Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, V, Prologue, xiv, 178-181.

to the flesh. The angels worship Him there; if we think that we sit there also, it is with impious presumption that we attempt to overthrow the throne of God.”

“It is written, you say, that ‘when we were dead in sins, He made us alive in Christ, by Whose grace you are saved, and has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:5-6). I acknowledge that it is so written; but it is not written that God allows men to sit on His right hand, but only to sit there in the Person of Christ. He is the foundation of all and is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23), in Whom our common nature according to the flesh has merited the right to the heavenly throne. Our flesh is honored as having a share in Christ, Who is God, and the nature of the whole human race is honored as having a share in the flesh.”

“As we sit in Him by fellowship in our fleshly nature, so also He through the obedience of all will become in us subject to the Father. Through the assumption of our flesh, He was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13); but a curse could not fall upon the Son of God in His deity. When (1) the Gentile has believed, and the Jew has acknowledged Him, Whom he crucified; (2) the Manichaeon has worshipped Him, Whom he has not believed to have come in the flesh; (3) the Arian has confessed Him to be Almighty, Whom he has denied; and (4) the wisdom of God, His justice, peace, love, and resurrection is in all, then Christ will be in us in subjection to the Father. This occurs through His own works and through the many forms of the virtues. When one spirit in the heart of all peoples has begun to cleave to God in all things, with vice renounced and crime at an end, then will God be all and in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

John Chrysostom noted⁷ that Paul spoke of the Father as the One who brought many sons to glory through Christ, and that suffering of various kinds is a means to that end.

“‘The Captain of our salvation’ is the Cause of our salvation. There is a great space between Him and us. He is both a Son, and we are sons; but He saves, we are saved. He both brings us together (bringing many sons to glory) and then separates us (to make perfect through sufferings). Then sufferings are a perfecting, and a cause of salvation. Do you see 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 suffering. His taking flesh to suffer is a far greater thing than making the world and bringing it out of nothing. Making the world is a token of His loving-kindness, but suffering is far more. Paul himself pointed out this same thing, ‘That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace, He both raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places 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 sufferings’ (Hebrews 2:10). Paul means that it was becoming of 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, he did not express himself like this, but said, ‘to make perfect through sufferings’, showing that suffering for anyone, profits not only ‘him’, but he becomes more glorious and more perfect.”

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, IV, 4-5.

John Chrysostom also stated⁸ that we should consider what Christ has done for us and be willing even to endure persecution on His behalf.

“Truly this is surpassing riches, truly surpassing is the greatness of His power, to make us sit down with Christ. If you had to enter the flames (i.e. persecution), shouldn’t you be ready to endure it? If you had to be cut to pieces every day, shouldn’t you be ready to embrace it cheerfully for the sake of these promises? Think where He sits! Above all principality and power! And with Whom it is that you sit! With Him! And who are you? One dead, by nature a child of wrath! And what good have you done? Nothing! Truly now it is high time to exclaim, ‘O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God’” (Romans 11:33).

We Are Christ’s Workmanship

Paul stated in the Epistle Reading, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Tertullian stated⁹ that this workmanship is twofold. First it refers to Creation and the nature of the flesh. Second, when Paul follows by saying, “created in Christ Jesus for good works”, he is referring to the work of grace. His workmanship includes bringing in the Gentiles to a oneness with the commonwealth of Israel. It also includes fulfilling and upgrading the Law such that the old statements of the Law are superfluous. For example, adultery has been upgraded to include lust in order to conform to the original intent of the Law.

“Paul says, ‘We were by nature the children of wrath’. The Jews were not the Creator’s children by nature, but by the election of their fathers. Paul referred their being children of wrath to nature, and not to the Creator, adding, ‘even as others’ (Ephesians 2:3), who were not children of God. It is clear that sins, lusts of the flesh, unbelief and anger are part of the common nature of all mankind. The devil however has led that nature astray, which he has already infected with the germ of sin. But ‘we are His workmanship, created in Christ’ (Ephesians 2:10). He who made man at first, also created him in Christ. It is one thing to make as a workman; it is another thing to create. But Paul assigns both to One Person: Christ; regarding the substance of nature, He ‘made’ him; regarding the work of grace, He ‘created’ him.”

“Look also at what follows in connection with these words. ‘Remember, that you were in time past Gentiles in the flesh, you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world’ (Ephesians 2:11-12). Now they were without Him to whom belonged the commonwealth of Israel, the covenants and the promise. ‘But now in Christ, you who were sometimes far off are made near by His blood’ (Ephesians 2:13). Since this is the case, the Gentiles are consequently now in Christ made near to these blessings, from which they were once far off.”

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v.

⁹ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 5, 17.

“Paul noted that it had been predicted concerning the call of the Gentiles from their distant alienation in words like these, ‘They who were far off from Me have come to My righteousness’ (Isaiah 46:12-13 paraphrase). The Creator’s righteousness no less than His peace was announced in Christ. Therefore, he says, ‘He is our peace, who has made both one’ (Ephesians 2:14); that is, the Jewish nation and the Gentile world. What is near, and what was far off now that ‘the middle wall has been broken down of their enmity’, are made one ‘in His flesh’” (Ephesians 2:15).

“He has made the Law obsolete by His own precepts, by Himself fulfilling the Law. For superfluous is, ‘You shall not commit adultery’, when He says, ‘You shall not look on a woman to lust after her’ (Matthew 5:27-28). It is impossible to make an adversary of the Law out of one who so completely promotes it. ‘He created in Himself of two, one new man, making peace’ (Ephesians 2:15), one really new, and one really man — no phantom — but new, and newly born of a virgin by the Spirit of God. He who had made is also the same who created, ‘For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:10). ‘He reconciled both to God’, the God whom both races, both Jew and Gentile, had offended, ‘in one body having in it slain the enmity by the cross’” (Ephesians 2:16).

John Chrysostom commented¹⁰ on Paul’s words, “Are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18), emphasizing the aspect of Christ’s workmanship that created us in Christ Jesus. First, he noted that the Holy Spirit is also God, just as the Father and the Son.

“Notice how he places the Spirit in the rank of God and raises the Corinthians up to the rank of the Apostles. He said, ‘You are the Epistle of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 3:3); and here, ‘But we all with open face’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Just as we needed no veil, so neither do you, who received it. This glory is far greater than Moses’ glowing face (Exodus 34:29-35), for this is not of our face, but of the Spirit. Nevertheless, you are able as well as we to look steadily upon it. They could not look even by a mediator, but you, without a mediator, can look steadily on a greater. They were not able to look upon that of Moses, you can look upon that of the Spirit. Now had the Spirit been inferior, He would not have set down these things for us as greater than those for Moses.”

“But what does it mean, ‘we reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image’ (2 Corinthians 3:18)? This was shown more clearly when the gifts of miracles were in operation; however, it is not difficult to see it for one who has believing eyes. As soon as we are baptized, the soul beams more than the sun, being cleansed by the Spirit; and not only do we behold the glory of God, but from it also receive a sort of splendor. Just as if pure silver were turned towards the sun’s rays, it will itself also shoot forth rays, not from its own natural property, but from the solar luster. So, does the soul after it is cleansed and made brighter than silver, receive a ray from the glory of the Spirit, and sends it back. He also said, ‘Reflecting as a mirror we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory’ (2 Corinthians 3:18), that is, from that of the Spirit, to our own glory,

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VII, 5-6.

which is generated in us. This is the sort of thing that one might expect from the Lord the Spirit.”

“Notice how he called the Spirit, Lord. And in other places too one may see that lordship of His. ‘As they ministered and fasted to the Lord, the Spirit said, Separate for me Paul and Barnabas’ (Acts 13:2). This was done in order to show the Spirit’s equality in honor. Christ said, ‘The servant doesn’t know what his Lord is doing’ (John 15:15), but even as a man knows his own things, so does the Spirit know the things of God; not by being taught them. The working as He wills shows His authority and lordship. This transforms us and cannot be conformed to this world; for such is the creation of which this is the Author. For as he said, ‘Created in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:10), so said he, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in my inward parts’” (Psalm 51:10, LXX).

We can “see” the Holy Spirit¹¹ just as Moses “saw” God; and we glow, reflecting the glory of God, after we have done so like a piece of polished silver. The gifts of the Spirit are the result, and we carry the King’s image in us throughout our life.

“Do you want me to show you this also from the Apostles more obviously to the sense? Consider Paul, whose garments healed; Peter, whose shadows were mighty (Acts 19:12; 5:15-16). If they had not borne a King’s image and if their radiance had not been unapproachable, their garments and shadows would not work so mightily. For the garments of a king inspire fear even to robbers. Do you want to see this beaming even through the body? ‘Looking steadfastly on the face of Stephen, they saw it as if it had been the face of an angel (Acts 6:15). But this was nothing compared to the glory flashing within. For what Moses had upon his face, these carried about with them on their souls. That of Moses was more obvious to the senses, but this was incorporeal. Like molten metal streaming down from metal in a furnace upon those things, which are close by, impart to them also somewhat of their own splendor; so truly does it also happen with the faithful. Those who are like this are set free from earth and have their dreams of the things in the heavens.”

The Riches of His Grace

Sometimes we tend to focus our attention on earthly riches to the exclusion of everything else. An illustration might put this in a better perspective. Suppose you were walking along the sidewalk in an unfamiliar neighborhood, and you saw a gold bar lying next to the sidewalk. This one was about 8 by 3 by 2 inches, weighed 400 Troy ounces, and was worth about \$ ¼ million according to 2006 gold prices. Would you pick it up and take it home, or would you leave it there? Most people could use an extra \$ ¼ million and would probably take it home¹².

Suppose that the gold bar was last owned by a man who just passed away leaving no heirs and no will. Plus, he left as note that whoever found his gold bar can have it. You now own the gold bar. The next week you were walking along the same sidewalk and noticed a dog pile in exactly the same spot that the gold bar was located earlier. Would you pick it up and take it home,

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, VII, 5-6.

¹² It might be wise to inquire who lost it, in case some mafia don wants it back!

or would you leave it there? Most people would express some kind of disgust and may complain against those who don't pick up after their pets; but few people would pick it up and take it home.

In perspective, the riches of Christ's grace that we will see at His return make the gold bar seem like the dog pile. In the next age, even the streets are paved with gold¹³, to indicate how common it is. If we can get an understanding of the implications of this, we will have a much different approach to life.

Paul spoke often of the riches of Christ, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways are past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). Paul was humbled by the grace that was given to him to proclaim the riches of Christ.

"To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what *the fellowship of the mystery is*, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. Now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*" (Ephesians 3:8-10).

Paul stated that Christ "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). What do these riches entail? In the Apostle John's vision of the Throne of God, he heard millions of angels around the Throne saying, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12). Thus the "riches" of Christ includes power, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing.

There is a mystery to this. It begins with forgiveness and it results in us knowing the mystery of His will and being strengthened in the inner man.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him" (Ephesians 1:7-10).

"For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-19).

¹³ There is a figurative meaning also to streets paved with gold; but the use of gold in the New Jerusalem indicates that gold as a high value medium of exchange is no longer there.

This riches of the glory of this mystery was hidden from ages and generations, but has been revealed to His saints, which includes the Gentiles.

“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, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles are: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 1:24-2:3).

Paul makes a big deal of the riches of Christ, where all things are now under His feet, and we are Christ’s inheritance!

“After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened. That you may know what the hope of His calling is, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. According to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. He put all *things* under His feet and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:15-23).

Athanasius of Alexandria spoke¹⁴ of the incomprehensible riches of Christ in terms of its strength and power. Because He is rich, He is able to work in diverse manners and varieties to each individual, some to provide milk, for others to provide vegetables and for others to provide meat. His richness produces different effects in different people, and many mansions are prepared with the Father to reward us in proportion to our advance in moral attainment. While all His people will be within the walls of His city, some will be rewarded more than others for their work in this life, for through virtue a man enters in to God.

“God multiplied His loving-kindness towards us, not only when He granted us our common salvation through His Word, but now also, when enemies have persecuted us, and have sought to seize us. Paul said, when describing the

¹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, Paschal Letters, X, 4.

incomprehensible riches of Christ, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ' (Ephesians 2:4-5). For the strength of man and of all creatures is weak; but the Strength which is above man and uncreated is rich, incomprehensible and eternal, and has no beginning. He does not then possess one method only of healing, but being rich, He works in diverse manners for our salvation by means of His Word, Who is not restricted or hindered in His dealings towards us. Since He is rich, He varies Himself according to the individual capacity of each soul. For He is the Word, the Power and the Wisdom of God, as Solomon testifies concerning Wisdom, that 'being one, it can do all things; and remaining in itself, it can make all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, makes them friends of God and prophets'" (Wisdom 7:27).

"To those who have not yet attained to the perfect way He becomes like a sheep giving milk. Paul administered this; 'I have fed you with milk, not with meat' (1 Corinthians 3:2). To those who have advanced beyond the full stature of childhood, but still are weak regarding perfection, He is their food, according to their capacity, again administered by Paul, 'Let him that is weak eat vegetables' (Romans 14:2). But as soon as a man begins to walk in the perfect way, he is no longer fed with milk or vegetables, but he has the Word for bread, and meat for food. 'Solid food is for those who are of full age, that is, those who, by reason of their capacity, have their senses exercised'" (Hebrews 5:14).

"And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it produces for some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matthew 13:8), as that Sower of grace teaches. And this is no doubtful matter, but it is in our power to behold the field, which He sows; for in the Church the word is clear and the produce rich. Such a field is adorned with virgins and monks and also with honorable matrimony and each one's chastity. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond its power. Mercy is not confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also to any rank, so that He might rescue all men to salvation."

"To this intent He has prepared many mansions with the Father (John 14:2), so that although the dwelling-place is various in proportion to our advance in moral attainment, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out and expelled. For apart from light there is darkness; apart from blessing there is a curse; the devil also is apart from the saints, and sin far from virtue. Therefore, the Gospel rebukes Satan, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan' (Matthew 4:10). But us it calls to itself, saying, 'Enter by the narrow gate' (Matthew 7:13). And again, 'Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom which is prepared for you' (Matthew 25:34). So also, the Spirit cried, saying, 'Enter into His gates with thanksgiving'" (Psalm 100:4).

"For through virtue a man enters in to God, as Moses did into the thick cloud where God was (Exodus 19:9). Through vice, a man goes out from the presence of the Lord; as Cain did when he had slain his brother (Genesis 4:16). Cain went out, as far as his will was concerned, from before the face of God. The Psalmist says, 'I will go in to the altar of God, even to the God that gladdens my youth' (Psalm 43:4 LXX). But the devil went out from before God, and smote Job with boils (Job

2:7). This is the characteristic of those who go out from before God — to beat and injure the men of God. And this is the characteristic of those who fall away from the faith — to injure and persecute the faithful. The saints on the other hand, take in others and look upon them as friends; as David says, ‘My eyes are on the faithful of the earth, that they may dwell with me’ (Psalm 101:6). But those that are weak in the faith, Paul urges that we should especially take in (Romans 14:1). For virtue is philanthropic, just as in men of an opposite character, sin is misanthropic. So, Saul, being a sinner, persecuted David, whereas David, though he had a good opportunity, did not kill Saul¹⁵. Similarly, Esau persecuted Jacob, while Jacob overcame Esau’s wickedness by meekness¹⁶. Again, the eleven brothers sold Joseph, but Joseph, in his loving-kindness¹⁷, had pity on them”.

John Chrysostom mused¹⁸ on the notion that Christ would bother to let us in on the mystery of His will, and on His wisdom in doing so.

“Strange! What friendship! He tells us His secrets; the mysteries of His will, as if one should say, He has made known to us the things that are in His heart. Here is the mystery, which is full of all wisdom and prudence. What will you say is equal to this wisdom? These people that were worth nothing, His wisdom has discovered a way of raising them to wealth and abundance. What can equal this wise contrivance? He that was an enemy, he that was hated, he is in a moment lifted up on high. And not this only, but yet more, that it should be done at this particular time, this again was the work of wisdom; and that it should be done by means of the Cross. It would take a long discourse here to point out how all this was the work of wisdom, and how He had made us wise. Therefore, he repeated again the words, ‘According to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself’ (Ephesians 1:9). That is to say, this He desired, this He worked for, that He might be able to reveal to us the mystery. What mystery? That He would have man seated up on high; and this has come to pass.”

Chrysostom noted¹⁹ that Paul prayed constantly for all the Churches that he founded as though he himself had received the greatest blessing. Why? Because of what is to come, because of the good things that are laid up in store for them who rightly believe and live. And it is fitting to give thanks to God, both for all the things which mankind has received at His hands, both past and future; and it is fitting to give Him thanks also for the faith of those that believe.

“Paul’s prayer is ‘That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ (Ephesians 1:17). Two things he requires them to understand, as it is their duty to understand them; to what blessings they are called, and how they have been released from their former state. We can understand regarding the things to come; for from the good things laid up for us, we shall know His ineffable and surpassing riches, and from understanding who we were, and how we believed, we shall know His power and sovereignty.

¹⁵ See 1 Samuel 24:1-19.

¹⁶ See Genesis 27, Genesis 32-33.

¹⁷ See Genesis 37:12-36,

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, I, vv. 8-9.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 15-20.

‘The weakness of God is stronger than men’ (1 Corinthians 1:25). It is by the same power by which He raised Christ from the dead, that He has also drawn us to Himself. That power is not limited to the resurrection, but far exceeds it.”

Chrysostom also spoke²⁰ of some parts of the mysteries of the glory of God that have been revealed and others that have not been revealed yet. The Church has an insight into these mysteries that the world does not, where persuading people to believe is more difficult than raising the dead. The key to understanding these mysteries is in comprehending the exaltation of Christ from the tomb to the Right Hand of the Father – where we accompany Him.

“Paul prayed that the Ephesians may be given ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ (Ephesians 1:17). He was about to mention some things, which had already come to pass, and others, which had not happened yet; he makes those which have been brought to pass, a pledge for those which haven’t. ‘That you may know what the hope of His calling is’ is as yet hidden, but not so to the faithful. Again, ‘what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints’ (Ephesians 1:18); this too is still hidden.”

“What is clear is that through His power, we have believed that He has raised Christ. To persuade souls, is a thing far more miraculous than to raise a dead body. To make this clear, Christ said to the dead, ‘Lazarus, come out’ (John 11:43), and immediately he obeyed. Peter said, ‘Tabitha, arise’ (Acts 9:40), and she got up. He Himself shall speak the word at the last day, and all shall rise so quickly, that ‘those who are alive, shall by no means precede those who have fallen asleep’ (1 Thessalonians 4:15) and all shall come to pass, ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye’ (1 Corinthians 15:52). But in the matter of believing, it is different; He said, ‘How often would I have gathered your children together, but you were not willing’ (Matthew 23:37). You perceive that this last is the more difficult. He builds up the whole argument that it is far more difficult to influence the choice, than to work on nature. He wants us to become good of our own will. Thus, with good reason he says, ‘The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe’” (Ephesians 1:19).

“‘The riches of the glory’ refers to the unutterable glory; for what language shall be adequate to express that glory of which the saints shall be partakers? Truly there is a need of grace in order that the understanding may perceive it and admit at least one little ray of light. Some things the Ephesians knew before; now he was desirous that they should learn more and know it more clearly. He has raised up Christ, which is not a small thing, and He has set Him at His right hand. Shall any language then be able to represent this? Him that is of the earth, who made a sport of demons, He has in a moment raised up on high. Truly this is the ‘exceeding greatness of His power’”.

“Notice where He has raised Him: ‘In the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 1:20, 2:6). He has made Him far above all created nature, far above all rule and authority. There is definitely a need for the Spirit for an understanding of this. We need to be wise in the knowledge of Him and be open to receive revelation. Reflect, how vast is the distance between the nature of man and the nature of God. Yet from this vile estate of man, He has exalted Him to that high dignity. Christ doesn’t mount up by

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 21-22.

degrees, and He doesn't ascend, 'above', but, 'far above'; for God is above those powers. And there He has raised Him, Who is one of us, brought Him from the lowest parts of the earth (i.e. Hades) to the most supreme sovereignty, to that beyond which there is no other honor."

"And gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church' (Ephesians 1:22). Amazing again, where He has raised the Church, as though he were lifting it up by some engine, he has raised it up to a vast height, and set it on the throne of God. For where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval of separation between the Head and the body; for if there were a separation, then it would no longer be a body, and it would no longer be a head."

"What is meant by 'over all things?' He has allowed neither Angel nor Archangel nor any other being to be above Him. But not only in this way has He honored us, in exalting that which is of our human nature, but also, He has prepared the whole race in common to follow Him, to cling to Him, to accompany His procession."

"When you hear of the Head you may not conceive the notion of supremacy only, but also of consolidation, and that you may behold Him not as supreme Ruler only, but as Head of a body. As though this were not sufficient to show the close connection and relationship, Paul adds, 'The fullness of Christ is the Church' (Ephesians 1:22-23). And rightly so, for the complement of the head is the body, and the complement of the body is the head. Note what great arrangement Paul observes, how he spares not a single word in representing the glory of God. The complement of the head is the body, because the body is composed and made up of all its several parts, and he introduced Him as having need of each single one, all in common and together. Unless we are many, and one is the hand, and another the foot, and another some other member, the whole body is not filled up. It is by all then that His body is filled up. Then is the head filled up, then is the body made perfect, when we are all knit together and united. Do you perceive the 'riches of the glory of His inheritance, the exceeding greatness of His power towards them that believe, the hope of your calling?'" (Ephesians 1:18-19)

Together with Christ

Paul stated, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive together** with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and **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 2:4-7). What does the "together with Christ" imply?

Paul had been speaking of the things, which concerned Christ (Ephesians 2:4-6), and these might not seem applicable to us, such as His resurrection; but Paul shows that they do extend to us, since He is made one with us. John Chrysostom pointed²¹ out some of the places where Christ said that we will sit with Him, and how this is honor above anything we can imagine.

"Paul states 'We, who were dead through our trespasses He raised up with Him and made us sit with Him' (Ephesians 2:5-6). Don't be unbelieving; take the

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v. 7.

demonstration he offers both from former things, from His Headship, and from His desire to show His goodness. How will He show it, unless we do this? He will show it in the ages to come, that the blessings are both great, and more certain than anything else. Right now, the things, which we talk about, may seem to be foolishness to unbelievers; but then everyone will know them.”

“How has He made us sit together with Him? Christ Himself said to the disciples, ‘You shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel’ (Matthew 19:28). And again, ‘But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give, but it is for them for whom it has been prepared by My Father’ (Matthew 20:23). So that it has been prepared! And well did he say, ‘in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus’ (Ephesians 2:7), for to sit on His right hand is honor above all honor; it is that beyond which there is none other. This he said, that even we shall sit there! Truly this is surpassing riches; truly surpassing is the greatness of His power, to make us sit down with Christ. If you had ten thousand souls, would you not lose them for His sake? If you had to enter the flames, shouldn’t you readily endure it? He Himself said again, ‘Where I am, there shall My servant be also’ (John 12:26). If you had to be cut to pieces every day, surely you ought, for the sake of these promises cheerfully embrace it? Think where He sits! Above all principality and power!”

“And with whom is it that you sit? With Him! And who you are? Someone who was dead, by nature a child of wrath! And what good have you done? Nothing! Truly now it is high time to exclaim, ‘Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!’” (Romans 11:33)

Chrysostom also noted²² that Satan had sunk Adam’s soul in the Garden of Eden just as criminals sink ships by boring a hole in the hull. But God made our gain greater than our loss by raising us up to sit with Him. This is hard to imagine and grasping even small parts of it becomes very slippery. The riches of His grace will be much clearer when we see it face to face.

“Criminals who sail the sea often bore through ships with a small iron tool and let in the whole sea to the ship from below. So accordingly, then, when the Devil saw the ship of Adam, that is his soul, full of many good things, he came and bored it through with his mere voice, as with some small iron tool, and emptied him of all his wealth and sank the ship. But God made the gain greater than the loss and brought our nature to the royal throne. Therefore, Paul says, ‘He raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him, on his right hand in the heavenly places, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us’ (Ephesians 2:7). This He has already shown, but not to all men; He has showed it to me, who am faithful, but the unbelieving has not yet seen the wonder. But in that day the whole nature of man will come forward, and will wonder at that which has been done, but especially will it be clearer to us. For we believe even now but hearing and sight do not put a wonder before us in the same way. Just as in the case of kings, when we hear of the purple robe, the crown, the golden clothing and the royal throne, we wonder at it; but we experience this in greater degree when the curtains are drawn aside and we see him seated on the lofty judgment seat. So also, in the case of the Only Begotten, when we see the curtains of heaven drawn

²² John Chrysostom, Against Those Who Say That Demons Govern Human Affairs, I, 2-3.

aside, and the King of angels descending, and with his bodyguard of the heavenly hosts, then we perceive the wonder to be greater from our sight of it. For consider what it is to see human nature borne upon the Cherubim, and the whole angelic force surrounding it.”

“Look at how many expressions Paul seeks for, so as to present to us the loving-kindness of God. He did not speak merely the word grace, nor riches, but ‘The exceeding riches of his grace in kindness’ (Ephesians 2:7). Just as slippery bodies escape our hold and slip through easily, even when grasped by countless hands; so also, are we unable to get hold of the loving-kindness of God in whatever expressions we may try to grasp it. The sheer magnitude of it baffles the feebleness of our utterances. Paul experienced this and seeing the force of words defeated by its magnitude, desists after saying one word: ‘Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift’ (2 Corinthians 9:15). For neither speech, nor any mind is able to set forth the tender care of God. He then says that it is beyond finding out, and elsewhere, ‘The peace of God which surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts’” (Philippians 4:7).

Chrysostom, in speaking on how to get there, encouraged²³ his people to avoid being suspicious of the poor man begging food. If we are together with Christ along with the poor man, we need to treat our brother accordingly. Christ will judge us by the same standards that we use to judge our fellow man.

“Now if it was gold and silver that the poor man asked of you, then there would be some reason for your suspicions. But if it is necessary food that he comes to you for, why take such an exact account of him, accusing him of idleness and sloth? If we must talk in this way, we ought to address ourselves, not others. When you go to God to ask forgiveness for your sins, call these words to mind, and you will know that you deserve to have these things said to you by God, much more than the poor man needs to hear these said by you. And yet God has never said such words to you such as you might say to a poor man: ‘Back off, you impostor, always coming to Church and hearing My Laws; when you are outside the Church, you set gold, pleasure, friendship, and in fact anything above My commandments. Now you make yourself humble, but when your prayers are over you are bold, cruel, and inhuman. Get out of My sight, and never come to Me any more’. This, and more than this, we deserve to have said to us. But still He never criticizes us in any such way, but He is long-suffering and fulfills everything on His part and gives us more than we ask for.”

“Calling this to mind then, let us relieve the poverty of those that beg of us; and if they impose on us, let us not be overly exact about it. For such a salvation is it that we ourselves require, one with pardon, with kindness, with much mercy along with it. For it is not possible, if our life were searched into strictly, that we should ever be saved, but we would need to be punished. Let us not be bitter judges of others lest we also get a strict account demanded of us. For we have sins that are too great to plead any excuse. Let us show more mercy towards those who have committed inexcusable sins, that we also may lay up for ourselves similar mercy

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XIV, v. 27.

beforehand. Even if we were as large-hearted as we could be, we shall never be able to contribute such love toward man as we stand in need of at the hand of God.”

“It is monstrous, when we are in need of so many things ourselves, for us to be too exacting with our fellow servants. We do not in this way prove him unworthy of our liberality; we prove ourselves unworthy of God’s love toward man. He that deals too exactly with his fellow servant, will be surer to find like treatment at the hand of God. Even if the poor come to us from idleness or willfulness, let us help them. We also do many sins through willfulness, or rather we do them all through willfulness, and yet God does not presently call us to punishment, but gives us a set time for penance, nurturing us day by day, disciplining us, teaching us, supplying us with all other things, that we too may emulate this mercy of His. Let us then quell this cruelty, let us cast out this brutal spirit. To these we may give money, bread, and clothing, but for ourselves we are storing up beforehand very great glory, and such as there is no putting into words.”

Instead we should be thinking of the incredible blessings together with Christ in the Kingdom of God, which are beyond our senses to describe. These are our rewards for being generous with the poor as God is generous with us.

“We will receive our bodies again incorruptible and are glorified together and reign together with Christ. How great this is we shall see later; there is no means of making us see it clearly now. But to start from our present blessings, and to get from them at least some kind of hint of our future blessings, I will endeavor to put before you what I have been speaking of. If when you were grown old, and were living in poverty, and anyone were to promise suddenly to make you young, to bring you to the prime of life, to render you very strong and preeminently beautiful, and were to give you the kingdom of the whole earth for a thousand years, a kingdom in the state of the deepest peace, what is there that you would not choose to do, and to suffer to gain this promise? Christ promises not this, but much more than this. The distance between old age and youth is not comparable with the difference of corruption and incorruption. An earthly kingdom and poverty is not comparable to that of the present glory and future glory; the difference is like dreams versus reality. There is no language capable of setting before you the greatness of the difference between things to come and things present. And as for time, there is no basis for the idea of difference. For what mode is there for a man to compare with our present state a life that has no limit? And as for the peace of the Kingdom of God, it is as far removed from any present peace, as peace is different from war; as for the incorruption of the Kingdom of God, it is as much better as a clear pearl is than a clod of clay. Or rather, say as great a thing as one may, nothing can describe the difference. If I were to compare the beauty of our bodies then to the light of the sunbeam, or the brightest lightning, I still shall not yet be saying anything that is worthy of that brilliancy. Now for such things as these, what money is so much that it was not worth the while to give it up? What bodies, or rather what souls is it not worth one’s while to give up? At present if anyone were to lead you into the palace, and in the presence of all were to give you an opportunity of conversing with the king, and make you sit at his table, and join in his dining, you would call yourself the happiest of men. But when you go up to

Heaven, and stand by the King of the universe Himself, and to speak with angels in brightness, and to enjoy that unutterable glory, do you hesitate whether you ought to give up a little money to help the poor?"

Dealing with Our Common Enemy

Just prior to the Epistle Reading, Paul said, "And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:1-3).

How does the prince of the power of the air operate, and what are his methods and limitations? John Cassian went into some detail²⁴ about the fall of Satan and his angelic followers.

They all had been in Eden, the Paradise of God, covered with all kinds²⁵ of precious stones (Ezekiel 28:12-15), but unrighteousness was found in them and they were thrown out. Satan had been highly honored, but in a burst of pride, he tried to exalt his throne to be like the Throne of God (Isaiah 14:12-14). One third of the angels of heaven fell with him (Revelation 12:4), but they have kept their ranks and their powers.

The demons had already fallen when they deceived Adam and Eve. He was called "serpent" before he deceived Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1), and he excelled all the other creatures in wickedness. The title of "serpent" and the comparison to beasts suggests that he was already an apostate.

The occasion of the envy and seduction, which led him to deceive man, arose from his previous fall, in that he saw that man, who had but recently been formed out of the dust of the ground, was called to that glory, from which he himself had fallen. His first fall, which was due to pride, earned him the name of the serpent. His second fall from envying came at the time of Adam and Eve. He was still in the possession of something upright, so that he could enjoy some interchange of conference and counsel with man. By the Lord's sentence (Genesis 3:14-15), he was properly thrown down further, that he might no longer walk erect as before, but should cling to the ground, creep along on his belly, and feed on the earthly food and works of sins. His secret hostility and enmity with man was exposed to our advantage, so that men are on their guard against him as a dangerous enemy, and he can no longer injure them by a deceptive show of friendship.

The atmosphere between heaven and earth is always filled with a thick crowd of spirits²⁶, which do not fly about in it quietly or idly; fortunately, God has

²⁴ Paraphrase of John Cassian, 2nd Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, viii, 8-14.

²⁵ Precious stones allude to holiness and the fruits of holiness. For example, the Breastpiece that the High Priest was required to wear when he entered the Holy of Holies was covered with 12 gemstones (Exodus 28:15-30). Similarly, the good work that we build on the foundation of Christ is represented as gold, silver and precious stones (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Prior to their fall, the demons had this; but their pride caused them to disregard it.

²⁶ This is also the view of Antony the Great; Athanasius of Alexandria had a slightly different viewpoint. Athanasius stated that Christ was crucified in the "air" to clear the air of the demons that filled the skies to prepare an

withdrawn them from human sight. If this were not the case, fear of their attacks, or horror at the forms into which they transform themselves at will, might drive men out of their wits by an intolerable dread, from inability to look on such things with bodily eyes. Or else men might grow worse and worse and be corrupted by their constant example. There would arise a dangerous familiarity between men and the unclean powers of the air. Those crimes, which are now committed among men, are concealed either by walls, enclosures, distance, space, or by some shame and confusion. But if they could always look on the demons directly, men would be stimulated to a greater pitch of insanity, as there would not be a single moment in which they would see the demons refrain from their wickedness.

These attacks, with which the demons assault men, they aim even against each other, fighting continuously²⁷, because of a sort of innate love of wickedness. We read of this when the angel Gabriel visited Daniel. The prince of the Persians resisted Gabriel for 21 days; Michael, one of the chief princes came to help him (Daniel 10:12-14). This prince of the Persians was a hostile power, which favored the Persians, an enemy of God's people. In order to hinder the good, which it saw would result from the solution of the question, for which Daniel prayed, in its jealousy it opposed Gabriel to prevent the angel from reaching Daniel too speedily. Gabriel said that even then, because of the fierceness of his assaults, he would not have been able to come to him, had not Michael the archangel come to help him, met the prince of the Persians, and defended him from his attack. The angel also said, "Now I will return to fight against the prince of the Persians. When I went out, the prince of the Greeks was coming. I will tell you what is written down in the Scriptures; and no one is my helper in all these things but Michael your prince" (Daniel 10:20-21). And again, "At that time Michael shall rise up, the great prince, who stands for your people" (Daniel 12:1). Thus, another demon was called the prince of the Greeks, opposed to the Persians as well as to the people of Israel. From which we clearly see that antagonistic powers rise against each other in quarrels of nations, which they show among themselves. They either exult at their victories or are cast down at their defeats. They thus cannot live in harmony among themselves, while each of them is always striving with restless jealousy on behalf of those whom he presides over, against the patron of some other nation.

We can see clear reasons why they are called principalities or powers; that is, because they rule over different nations, and over inferior demons, of which the gospels give us evidence by their own confession that there exist legions²⁸ of them (Mark 5:8-9). For they could not be called lords unless they had some over whom to exercise the sway of lordship; nor could they be called powers or principalities, unless there were some over whom they could claim power. This we find pointed out very clearly by the Pharisees in their blasphemy, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub the prince of the demons" (Luke 11:15). They are also called "rulers of darkness" (Ephesians 6:12), and one of them is called "the prince of this world"

opening for us up into heaven. Thus Christ saw Satan fall like lightning (Luke 10:18). See Athanasius, The Incarnation of the Word, XXV, 5-6.

²⁷ The Canaanites, prior to the Conquest, seem to have imitated the demons in continuously fighting against each other (Numbers 13:32).

²⁸ A Roman legion consisted of 6,000 foot-soldiers and included some cavalry also.

(John 14:30). But Paul declares that when Christ has subdued all things, these orders shall be destroyed, “When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God the Father, when He shall have destroyed all principalities²⁹, powers and dominions” (1 Corinthians 15:24). This can only take place if they are removed from the control of those over whom we know that powers, dominions and principalities take charge in this world.

Athanasius of Alexandria documented³⁰ some of the things that Antony the Great learned in his wars with the demons. Demons are all around us and there are many different ranks of them, each with different capabilities. They were created good, but rebelled; they are now jealous of us and wish to hinder us from ascending to where they once were. They tempt us, place hindrances to hamper us, give us false visions to frighten us, or give us false prophecy to lead us astray; and they do this shamelessly. They may also imitate pious people, the sound of sacred music, and try to shame us for not being good enough as Christians. We do not need to fear their appearance or listen to their words.

“We have terrible and crafty foes — the evil spirits — and against them we wrestle, as the Apostle said, ‘Not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12). Great is their number in the air around us³¹, and they are not far from us. Now there are great distinctions among them. But at this time, it is necessary for us only to know their wiles against us.”

“First, we must know this: that the demons have not been created evil, for God made nothing evil, but even they have been made good. Having fallen from the heavenly wisdom, they have since then been groveling on earth. On the one hand they deceived the Greeks with their displays, while out of envy of us Christians they move all things in their desire to hinder us from entry into the heavens, in order that we should not ascend up to the place from which they fell. Thus, there is need of much prayer and of discipline, that when a man has received through the Spirit the gift of discerning spirits, he may have power to recognize their characteristics; that is, which of them are less and which are more-evil; of what nature is the special pursuit of each, and how each of them is overthrown and cast out. For their evildoing and the changes in their plots are many. Paul and his followers knew such things when they said, ‘for we are not ignorant of his devices’ (2 Corinthians 2:11); and we, from the temptations we have suffered at their hands, ought to correct one another to expose them.”

“The demons, therefore, if they see Christians, and monks especially, laboring cheerfully and advancing, 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 their attack fails, they don’t cease, but dishonestly and by subtlety come back again. For when they cannot deceive the heart openly with

²⁹ Many English translations use the words “all rule, authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24) and “all principalities, powers and dominions” (Ephesians 6:12). However, in Greek, the words are the same for both.

³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony*, 21-25.

³¹ This was the view of Antony and John Cassian; see also Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word*, XXV, 5-6.

immoral pleasures they approach in different manner. Shaping displays, they attempt to strike fear, changing their shapes, taking the forms of women, wild beasts, creeping things, gigantic bodies, and troops of soldiers. But 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 cross³². Yet they are bold and shameless, for if thus they are beaten they make an onslaught in another manner, and pretend to prophesy and foretell the future, and to show themselves of a height reaching to the roof and of great width. By such displays they may catch those who could not be deceived by their arguments. If here also they find the soul strengthened by faith and a hopeful mind, then they bring their leader in to help them.”

“They often appear as the Lord revealed the devil to Job. ‘His eyes are as the morning star. From his mouth proceeds burning torches and the smoke of a furnace proceeds from his nostrils. His breath is like live coals and from his mouth issues flames’ (Job 41:9-12 LXX). When the prince of the demons appears in this manner, the crafty one strikes terror by speaking great things, as the Lord convicted him saying to Job, for ‘he counts iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood, he counts the sea as a pot of ointment, and the depth of the abyss as a captive, and the abyss as his range’ (Job 41:18, 22-23 LXX). And by the prophet, ‘the enemy said, I will pursue and overtake’ (Exodus 15:9), and again by another, ‘I will take the whole world in my hand as a nest and take it up as eggs that have been left’ (Isaiah 10:14 LXX). Such are their boasts and professions that they may deceive the godly. But not even then ought we to fear his appearance or give heed to his words. He is a liar and never speaks a word of truth. And though speaking many words with great boldness, like a dragon he was drawn with a hook by the Savior (Job 41:1), and as a beast of burden he received the halter round his nostrils, and as a runaway his nostrils were bound with a ring (Job 41:2). The Lord bound him as a sparrow, that we should mock him (Job 40:19-24). With him are placed the demons, his cohorts, like serpents and scorpions to be trodden underfoot by us Christians (Luke 10:19-20). And the proof of this is that we now live opposed to him. He who threatened to dry the sea and seize the world, now cannot resist our discipline, or even me speaking against him. Let us not pay attention to his words, for he is a liar; and let us not fear his visions, seeing that they themselves are deceptive. That which appears in them is not true light, but they are rather the preludes and likenesses of the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned. They may appear; but in a moment disappear again, hurting none of the faithful, but bringing with them the likeness of that fire which is about to receive them. It is not fitting that we should fear them on account of these things; for through the grace of Christ all their practices are in vain.”

“Again, they are treacherous, and are ready to change themselves into all forms and assume all appearances. Very often without appearing they imitate the music of harp and voice and recall the words of Scripture. Sometimes, while we are reading they immediately repeat many times, like an echo, what is read. They arouse the monks from our sleep to prayers; and this constantly, hardly allowing us

³² See also Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 13.

to sleep at all. At another time they assume the appearance of monks and imitate the speech of holy men, that by their similarity they may deceive and thus drag their victims where they want. But we must not pay attention to them even if they arouse to prayer, even if they counsel us not to eat at all, even though they seem to cast shame upon us for not doing those things. For they do this not for the sake of piety or truth, but that they may carry off the simple to despair. They do this that they may say that the discipline is useless, and make men loathe the solitary life as a trouble and burden and hinder those who walk in it.”

John Cassian described³³ the orthodox method of spiritual combat as the discipline of one’s body by fasting, such that the athlete of Christ, in his struggles, ends up inciting progressively more powerful enemies to rise against him.

“The orthodox method of spiritual combat, that is, how the athlete of Christ gains a victory over the rebellious flesh, is carried out by beating the demons where they dwell. ‘He does not run uncertainly’, because he trusts that he will eventually enter the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem. He ‘fights’, with fasts and humiliation of the flesh, ‘not as one that beats the air’ (1 Corinthians 9:26). That is, he strikes with blows of self-restraint, through which he struck not the empty air, but those spirits who inhabit it, by the discipline of his body. When Paul says ‘not as one that beats the air’, this shows that he strikes, not empty air, but certain beings in the air. After a person has overcome in this kind of contest, and has been rewarded, he begins to do battle against still more powerful enemies. Paul, having triumphed over his former demonic rivals, boldly makes proclamation, ‘Now our striving is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places’” (Ephesians 6:12).

“The athlete of Christ, as long as he is in the body, progresses to a more severe kind of struggle to confront him. For when the flesh is subdued and conquered, many swarms of enemies are incited by his triumphs and rise up against the victorious soldier of Christ! In the case of peace the soldier of Christ might relax his efforts and begin to forget the glorious struggles of his contests, and be cheated of the recompense of his triumphs. When this conflict is ended we may be able to say with him, ‘we wrestle not against flesh and blood’, etc. Otherwise we cannot possibly do battle with them nor deserve to do well in any spiritual combat if we are beaten down in a struggle with the belly. Deservedly it will be said of us in the language of blame, ‘Temptation does not overtake you, except what is common to man’” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

John Cassian also stated³⁴ that different demons have different strengths, and that the weaker demons are assigned to weaker Christians. Christ Himself is also involved that we might be able to bear it. The demons also have to struggle in their advances against us; as we are damaged when they overcome, so they are damaged when we overcome. In Appendix A, Cassian gives examples, mostly from the Psalms, of some of these struggles, where many of the Psalms are directed against demons.

³³ John Cassian, Twelve Books on the Institutes of the Coenobia, V, 18-19.

³⁴ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 20-21.

“All demons do not have the same fierceness and energy, or the same boldness and malice, and that with beginners and feeble folk only the weaker spirits join battle, and when this spiritual wickedness is beaten, then gradually the assaults of stronger ones are made against the athlete of Christ. For in proportion to a man’s strength and progress, is the difficulty of the struggle made greater. None of the saints could possibly be equal to the endurance of the malice of so great enemies, unless the merciful judge of our contest, Christ Himself, equalized the strength of the combatants, repelled and checked their excessive attacks, and made with the temptation a way of escape as well that we might be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

“Our belief is that demons undertake this struggle not without effort on their part. For in their conflict they themselves have some sort of anxiety, especially when they are matched with stronger rivals, like saints and men of perfection. Otherwise there would be no contest or struggle, but only a simple deception of men, and someone free from anxiety on their part would be assigned to us. And how then would Paul’s words stand, ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places’ (Ephesians 6:12); and, ‘Thus I fight, not as one that beats the air’ (1 Corinthians 9:26); and again, ‘I have fought the good fight?’ (2 Timothy 4:7). For where it is spoken of as a fight, there must be effort on both sides, and equally there must either be in store for them embarrassment for their failure, or delight upon their victory. If one fights with ease against another who struggles with great effort; and in order to overthrow his rival makes use of his will alone as his strength, it ought not to be called a battle, but a sort of unfair and unreasonable assault. But they certainly have to work, and when they attack men, they exert themselves in order to secure the victory, which they want to obtain; and they receive the same confusion, which was awaiting us, had we been beaten by them.”

Paul encouraged people to “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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 6:11-12). John Chrysostom stated³⁵ that our enemy does not fight with us openly, but by “wiles”, where he never proposes to us sins in their proper colors. The conflict is not about riches or glory, but about our being enslaved. Vast interests are at stake, for the expression “in the heavenly places” is equivalent to “for the heavenly things”.

“Paul stated that we struggle not, against the fighting and the hostilities of the devil, but against the ‘wiles’. For this enemy is at war with us, not simply, or openly, but by ‘wiles’. To use ‘wiles’ is to deceive by artifice; a thing, which takes place by words, actions, and stratagems, in the case of those who seduce us. The Devil never proposes to us sins in their proper colors; he does not speak of idolatry, but he sets it off in another fashion using ‘wiles’, that is, making his presentation plausible, employing disguises. Paul is rousing the soldiers and making them vigilant, persuading and instructing them, that our conflict is with one skilled in the arts of war, and with one who fights not simply, or directly, but with much wiliness.

³⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XXII, vv. 11-12.

First Paul arouses the disciples from the consideration of the Devil's skill; in the second place, from his nature, and the number of his forces. It is not from any desire to undermine the morale of the soldiers that stand under him, but to arouse, and awaken them, that he mentions these stratagems, and prepares them to be vigilant. Had he merely detailed their power, and then stopped, he might have dispirited them. He raises their courage by showing that it is possible to overcome such an enemy; for the more clearly the strength of our adversaries is stated to our own people, the more serious our soldiers will become."

"Having stimulated them by the character of the conflict, he next goes on to arouse them also by the prizes set before them. Having said that the enemies are fierce, he adds that they deprive us of vast blessings. The conflict lies 'in the heavenlies'; the struggle is not about riches, or about glory, but about our being enslaved. And thus, is the enmity irreconcilable. Any fighting gets fiercer when vast interests are at stake; for the expression 'in the heavenlies' is equivalent to, 'for the heavenly things'. It is not that they may gain anything by the conquest, but that they may deprive us of our reward. Observe how the power of the enemy startles us; it makes us hesitant to know that the hazard is on behalf of vast interests, and the victory for the sake of great rewards. He is doing his best to get us cast out of Heaven" (just like he had been cast out).

"Paul speaks of certain 'principalities, and powers, and world-rulers of this darkness'. The darkness is not that of night, but of wickedness. 'For you were', he said, 'once darkness' (Ephesians 5:8); so naming that wickedness which is in this present life; for beyond this present life, it will have no place, not in Heaven, nor in the world to come."

"By 'the world', Paul means wicked men, and the evil spirits have special power over them. "He calls them 'World-rulers', not as having the mastery over the world, but the Scripture tends to call wicked practices 'the world'. For example, Christ said, 'They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world' (John 17:16), but they are clothed with flesh of the world. And again, 'The world cannot hate you (Christ's opponents), but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil' (John 7:7). Again, He calls wicked practices by this name. Thus Paul, by 'the world' means wicked men, and the evil spirits have special power over them. There are 'the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places', just as in the heavenly places there are 'thrones, dominions, principalities and powers'" (Colossians 1:16).

Heirs with Christ

Paul spoke of the saints as the inheritance of Christ in the age to come, and that we need to be enlightened about this.

"I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power" (Ephesians 1:16-19).

At that time, He will show us the “exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7). In the meantime,

“He has made known to us the mystery that we may understand Paul’s knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy Apostles and Prophets, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel” (Ephesians 3:3-6).

Paul spoke about “preaching to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). John Chrysostom spoke³⁶ about how this was one of the mysteries of God that no one would have ever guessed.

“If His ‘riches are unsearchable’, and this is after his appearing, much more is His Essence unsearchable. If His riches are still a mystery, much more was it before it was made known; for he calls it a mystery on this account, because the angels didn’t know it, nor was it clear to anyone else. Angels knew only this, that ‘The Lord’s portion was His people’ (Deuteronomy 32:9). It is no wonder that they were ignorant of this; for if they were ignorant of the circumstances of the return from the Captivity, much more would they be of these things. For this is the gospel: ‘It is He that shall save His people’ (Matthew 1:21). Not a word about the Gentiles! But what concerns the Gentiles, the Spirit reveals. That they were called, the Angels knew, but that it was to the same privileges as Israel, even to sit upon the throne of God, who would ever have expected this? Who would ever have believed?”

At the present time, “we are children of God, and 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” (Romans 8:16-17). “Having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3: 7).

The widely quoted John 3:16 does not declare His love only for those in the Church or even just for humanity, but for *all of creation*; even the order of nature has been affected by our fall and needs to be redeemed. This Apostle, whom the Lord especially loved as a friend, says that God Himself is love (1 John 4:8-10, 16); we only love God in return as an imitator of love. Meeting around the Throne of God and surrounded by the love of the saints, this love takes on tangibility.

Yet it is by God’s grace that we have escaped from death to life (Ephesians 2:5). Again, the theme is that divine love is the origin of our salvation. Thus, while we might just barely find heart to die for a righteous person, Christ did so for us as while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-8).

Hippolytus stated³⁷ that when we become immortal at the resurrection of all the dead, we also become a god as a joint-heir with Christ, all because of water and the Spirit.

“The Father of immortality sent the immortal Son and Word into the world, who came to man in order to wash him with water and the Spirit. He, begetting us

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VII.

³⁷ Hippolytus, “The Discourse on the Holy Theophany”, Extant Works and Fragments, Part II, 8, 10.

again to incorruption of soul and body, breathed into us the breath (spirit) of life, and arrayed us with an incorruptible armor. If, therefore, man has become immortal, he will also be god. And if he is made god by water and the Holy Spirit after the regeneration of the laver, he is found to be also joint-heir with Christ after the resurrection from the dead. Therefore, I preach to this effect: Come, all you kindred of the nations, to the immortality of the baptism. I bring good news of life to you who dwell in the darkness of ignorance. Come into liberty from slavery, into a kingdom from tyranny, into incorruption from corruption. And how shall we come? By water and the Holy Spirit! This is the water in conjunction with the Spirit, by which Paradise is watered, by which the earth is enriched, and (to sum up the whole in a single word) by which man is begotten again and given life, in which also Christ was baptized, and in which the Spirit descended in the form of a dove.”

“Come then, be begotten again into the adoption of God. And how? If you practice adultery no more, and don’t commit murder, and don’t serve idols. If you are not mastered by pleasure; if you don’t allow pride to rule you; if you clean off the filthiness of impurity and put off the burden of sin. Cast off the armor of the devil and put on the breastplate of faith. ‘Wash, and seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow. And come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are as scarlet, I shall make them white as snow; and though they be like crimson, I shall make them white as wool. And if you are willing, and hear my voice, you shall eat the good of the land’ (Isaiah 1:16-19). Do you see, beloved, how the prophet spoke beforehand of the purifying power of baptism? For he who comes down in faith to the laver of regeneration, and renounces the devil, and joins himself to Christ; who denies the enemy, and makes the confession that Christ is God; who puts off the bondage, and puts on the adoption, he comes up from the baptism brilliant as the sun, flashing forth the beams of righteousness, and, which is indeed the chief thing, he returns a son of God and joint-heir with Christ.”

John Chrysostom spoke³⁸ of keeping our goal in sight: that is the Kingdom of Heaven. Compared to our inheritance at the Second Coming, gold in this life is like mud. While this life is a struggle, angels will honor and reverence us when we attain that prize.

“Never attempt slippery things, and you will not fall; walk on firm ground, with your head up and with your eyes up; these commands trainers give to runners. Thus, your strength is supported; but if you stoop down, you fall. Look upward, where the prize is; the sight of the prize increases the determination of our will. The hope of taking it doesn’t allow us to notice the work, it makes the distance appear short. And what is this prize? The kingdom of heaven, everlasting rest, glory together with Christ, the inheritance, brotherhood, ten thousand good things, which it is impossible to name. It is impossible to describe the beauty of that prize; he who has it alone knows it, and he who is about to receive it. It is not gold, it is not set with jewels, it is far more precious. Gold is mud compared to that prize, precious stones are just bricks in comparison with its beauty. If you have this, and depart to heaven, you will be able to walk there with great honor; the angels will reverence you, when you bear this prize; with much confidence will you approach

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XII, vv. 13-14.

them all. It is impossible without an impulse from Him to ascend over so vast a gap between earth and heaven; we have need of much help. He has willed that you should struggle below, on high, He crowns you. The crown is not in this world, where the contest is; it is in that bright place. Notice that the most honored of the wrestlers and charioteers are not crowned in the arena, but the king calls them up to the podium, and crowns them there. Thus, too is it here, in heaven you receive the prize.”

Chrysostom also spoke³⁹ of the great mystery that is being revealed by the Church. The King of the Universe is treating us with honor and is entrusting a secret to us: the mystery of Christ and His Church. We should be grateful for the honor He has shown us, even if we don’t understand it very well.

“The dispensation on our behalf he calls a “mystery,” and well may it be so called, since it is not clear to all. It was not clear to the Angels, for how could it be, when it was ‘made known by the Church?’ (Ephesians 3:10). Therefore, he says, ‘without controversy great is the mystery’. Great indeed it was. God became Man, and Man became God. A Man was seen without sin! A Man was received up, was preached in the world! Together with us the Angels saw Him. This is indeed a mystery! Let us not then expose this mystery but let us live in a manner worthy of the mystery. They to whom a mystery is entrusted are great persons. We account it a mark of favor, if a king entrusts a secret to us. But God has committed His mystery to us, yet are we ungrateful to our Benefactor, as if we had not received the greatest benefits? Our insensitivity to such a kindness should strike us with horror.”

“In keeping this mystery, let us be faithful to our trust. So great a mystery has He entrusted to us, and we do not trust Him even with our money, though He has asked us to store our wealth with Him, where none can take it away, neither can moth nor thief waste it. And He promises to pay us a hundred-fold, yet we don’t obey Him. Here if we entrust any with a deposit, we receive nothing back in addition, but are thankful if our deposit is restored. He repays a hundred-fold here, and eternal life is added later, yet we do not lay up our treasure there! ‘But’, you say, ‘He repays so slowly’. Well this too is a proof of the greatness of His gift, that He does not repay here in this mortal life; or rather He does repay here a hundred-fold. For did not Paul leave his tools here, Peter his rod and hook, and Matthew his custom (tax) seat? Was not the whole world opened to them more than to kings? Were not all things laid at their feet? Were they not appointed rulers and lords? Did not men commit their lives into their hands, suspend themselves wholly upon their counsel, and enlist in their service? And do we not see many similar occurrences now? Many men of poor and humble means, whose only livelihood was digging, and had barely enough food, but who had the character of monks, have been celebrated above all men, and honored by kings.”

Jerome stated⁴⁰ that the diverse wisdom of God is made known through the Church to the bodiless powers. Part of this diversity has to do with rewards given out in proportion to our deeds.

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XI, v. 16.

⁴⁰ Jerome, “Against Jovinianus”, Treatises, II, 23.

‘For we all’, he says, ‘must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad’. And you cannot say that the mode of our appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ is such that the good receive good things, the bad evil things; for he teaches us in the same epistle that he who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Surely, he who sows more and he who sows less are both on the right side⁴¹. And although they belong to the same class, that of the sower, yet they differ with respect to measure and number. The same Paul says, ‘to the intent that now to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God’ (Ephesians 3:10). You observe that it is a varied and diverse wisdom of God, which is spoken of as existing in the different ranks of the Church. And in the same epistle we read, ‘To each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the grace of Christ’; not that Christ’s measure varies, but that only so much of His grace is poured out as we can receive.

Faith: the Gift of God

Paul said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Thus, salvation comes through faith, which itself is a gift we receive from God. Chrysostom commented⁴² that had Christ not come, had He not called us, we would not have been able to believe? The work of faith itself is not our own.

“In order that the greatness of the benefits given to you may not raise you too high, observe how he brings you down: ‘By grace you have been saved, through faith’ (Ephesians 2:8). Then on the other hand, that our freewill might not be impaired, he adds also our part in the work and adds, ‘and that not of ourselves’”.

“He means that neither is faith ‘of ourselves’. Because had He not come, had He not called us, how had we been able to believe? For ‘how shall they believe, unless they hear?’ (Romans 10:14). So that the work of faith itself is not our own! ‘It is the gift of God’; it is ‘not of works’”.

“Was faith then, you will say, enough to save us? No; but God has required this, lest He should save us, barren and without work at all. His expression is that faith saves, but it is because God so wills, that faith saves. Since how, tell me, does faith save without works? This itself is the gift of God.”

“That he may excite in us proper feeling regarding this gift of grace, he said, ‘That no man should glory’ (Ephesians 2:9). ‘What then?’ said a man, ‘Has He Himself hindered our being justified by works?’ By no means! But no one is justified by works, in order that the grace and loving kindness of God may be shown. He did not reject us as having works, but exclusive of works He has saved us by grace; so that no man from now on may have anything to boast of. And then, lest when you hear that the whole thing is accomplished not by works but by faith, you might become idle, observe how he continues, ‘For we are His workmanship,

⁴¹ That is, at the Lord’s right hand, when He separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32-33).

⁴² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IV, v. 8.

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

“Observe the words he uses. He alludes to the regeneration, which is in reality a second creation. We have been brought from non-existence into being. As to what we were before, that is, the old man, we are dead. What we have now become, we were not before. Truly then this is a work of creation, and more noble than the first. From that one, we have our being; but from this last, we have, over and above, our wellbeing.”

“‘God prepared this beforehand that we should walk in them’. Not merely that we should begin, but that we should walk in them, for we need a virtue, which shall last throughout our life, and be extended on to our dying day. If we had to travel a road leading to a royal city, and then when we had passed over the greater part of it, we were to get tired and sit down near the very end, it would be of no use to us. This is the hope of our calling; for ‘for good works’ he says. Otherwise it would profit us nothing.”

It is by faith, rather than by observing rituals, so that both Jews and Gentiles can be united in one Body, the Church, as true heirs of Abraham, who himself was accepted because of his ardent faith (Romans 4:16). It involves a new birth into a new race: whoever receives Christ and believes on Him becomes born of God (John 1:12-13). All boasting is excluded, as all people, like Abraham, are justified by faith.

So we find that works are still important, and are necessary as the results of our calling by God; the transformation of our lives is the purpose of our salvation (Ephesians 2:10). Each person will receive rewards according to his deeds (Romans 2:6-8). Like the slaves who were given the five talents and the two talents, more of the “exceeding riches” (Ephesians 2:7) are stored up for those whose hearts are bent on doing good works to the utmost. As we participate with the Body of Christ in worshipping our Lord, we are given more insight into the “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) that surround us and we are motivated to imitate them in their works.

Chrysostom also pointed out⁴³ that while Christ has made us partakers of the mysteries of His grace, we couldn’t understand any of this without the Holy Spirit. Once we learn it directly from the Holy Spirit, all questions and arguments cease.

“Vast are the mysteries and secrets of which Christ has made us partakers. It is not possible for us to understand these, other than by being partakers of the Holy Spirit, and by receiving abundant grace. It is for this reason that Paul prays, ‘The Father of glory’ (Ephesians 1:17), that is, He that has given us vast blessings, for he constantly addresses Him according to the subject he is on, for instance, ‘The Father of mercies and God of all comfort’” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

“We need to raise our understanding, for it is not possible otherwise to understand these things. ‘The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him’ (1 Corinthians 2:14). So then, there is need of spiritual ‘wisdom’, that we may perceive spiritual things, that we may see hidden things. That Spirit ‘reveals’ all things, and He is going to set forth the mysteries of God. Now the knowledge of the mysteries of God, the Spirit alone comprehends,

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, III, vv. 21-22.

who also searches the deep things of Him. Note that it is not said, ‘that Angel, or Archangel, or any other created power’, may confer upon you a spiritual gift. And if this is really revelation, then all arguments are consequently vain, for he that has learned God, and knows God, shall no longer dispute concerning anything. He will not say, ‘This is impossible, and that is possible’, and ‘How did the other thing come to pass?’ If we learn God, as we ought to know Him; if we learn God from Him from whom we ought to learn Him, that is from the Spirit Himself; then shall we no longer dispute concerning anything.”

Chrysostom suggested⁴⁴ that we imitate the Apostles in their humility and don’t think that anything that we do is great. For all we have and are able to do is from the graciousness of God.

“As the Apostles went about into the country and the cities, observe both the simplicity of the Gentiles, and the maliciousness of the Jews. By their actions the Gentiles showed that they were worthy to hear; they honored them from the miracles only. The Gentiles honored them as gods, the Jews persecuted them as pestilent fellows. The Gentiles not only welcomed the preaching, but said, ‘The gods, in the likeness of men, have come down to us’. But the Jews were offended. The Gentiles ‘called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury’ (Acts 14:11, 12). I suppose Barnabas was a man of dignified appearance. Here was a new sort of trial, from unrestrained zeal of their followers, and no small one. But this also shows the virtue of the Apostles, and how on all occasions they ascribe everything to God. Let us imitate them; let us think nothing our own, seeing even faith itself is not our own, but is more God’s than ours. ‘For by grace are you saved through faith; and this not of ourselves; it is the gift of God’ (Ephesians 2:8). Let us not think great things of ourselves, or be puffed up, being as we are, men, dust and ashes, smoke and shadow. Why would we think great things of ourselves? If we give alms, even lavishing our substance, think, what if God had chosen not to make you rich? Think of those that are impoverished; think how many have given not their substance only, but their bodies also; and after their numberless sacrifices, have still felt that they were miserable creatures! We give for ourselves; Christ gave not for Himself, but for us. We just paid a debt; Christ owed us nothing. See the uncertainty of the future, and ‘do not be haughty but fear’ (Romans 11:20); do not lessen your virtue by boastfulness. If we want to do something truly great, never let a conjecture of your attainments as being great enter your mind.”

Chrysostom also pointed out that Paul reminded⁴⁵ the Corinthians that their sanctification came not from their deeds but from the grace of God as they answered His call. Our faith is not completely ours since we obeyed a call.

“What is Sanctification? Answer: The Laver, the Purification! Paul reminded them of their own uncleanness, from which he had freed them; and so persuades them to lowliness of mind. They had been sanctified not by their own good deeds, but by the loving-kindness of God.”

“We are ‘called to be Saints’ (1 Corinthians 1:2). Even this, to be saved by faith, is not of ourselves; for we did not first draw near but were called; so that not

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXX

⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, I, 1-2.

even this small matter is ours altogether. However, though you had drawn near, accountable as you are for innumerable wickedness, not even so would the grace be yours, but it is God's. Paul said, 'By grace have you been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves' (Ephesians 2:8). Not even the faith is yours altogether; for you were not first with your belief but obeyed a call."

Justification by Faith

The term "Justification by Faith" grew up during the Protestant Reformation, and it is regarded as the act whereby God, by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, acquits a man of the punishment due to his sins, and in His mercy treats him as though he were righteous. But the use of the term "Justification by Faith" is a relatively modern phenomenon and was not used in the same way by the Church Fathers. Martin Luther taught that such "Justification by Faith" was granted to men in response to faith alone, and that with it the sinner was imputed with the merits of Christ. As Fr. John Breck pointed out, however, "This interpretation means that our righteousness is little more than a legal fiction. It means that God treats us *as if* we were just or righteous, although He (like us) knows full well that we are not".

By contrast, in the Orthodox tradition "righteousness," is understood more as an expression of love and mercy than as one of divine justice that must be "satisfied." Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, followers of Christ are capable of receiving that divine righteousness as a gift – one that can actually work a transformation in human life by enabling us to pray, to wage spiritual warfare against the passions, and to love both God and other people.

In the Orthodox perspective, there is no thought that we must accumulate merits in order to justify ourselves before God. Nor, on the other hand, is there a denial of the place and importance of good works in Christian life (Ephesians 2:8-10)! Salvation is accomplished by grace in response to faith. But that faith cannot be passive; it must express itself, not merely by confessing Jesus as "personal Lord and Savior", but by feeding, clothing, visiting and otherwise caring for the "least" of Jesus' brethren (Matthew 25:31-46).

For some more details of this argument, see Appendix B.

Appendix A: Demons Addressed in the Psalms

Many of the Psalms must be understood as directed against demons. These Psalms may appear to be addressed to men, but there is a very sinister influence behind them. For example:

“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become good for nothing, and there is none that does good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known; there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Psalm 14:3).

The significance of this is that the Psalmist would be teaching us to hate our enemies, which is blasphemy, if the Psalms are all about men. While we are instructed to love our enemies, we are not instructed to love the demons, since they have already been condemned. John Cassian addressed⁴⁶ this demonic undertone as follows:

“As it is said, ‘His sorrow shall be turned on his own head’ (Psalm 7:16 LXX); and again, ‘Let the snare which he knows not come upon him and let the net which he has hidden catch him, and into that same snare let him fall’ (Psalm 35:8 LXX); that is, that which he contrived for the deception of men. The demons themselves also come to grief, and as they damage us so are they also in like manner damaged by us, and when they are beaten they depart with confusion. Seeing these defeats of theirs and their struggles, one who had good eyes in his inner man, seeing that they gloated over the downfall of individuals, and fearing lest his own case might furnish them with this kind of delight, prayed to the Lord. ‘Lighten my eyes that I don’t sleep in death, lest my enemy say, I have prevailed against him. They that trouble me will rejoice if I am moved’ (Psalm 13:4-5 LXX); and ‘O My God, let them not rejoice over me; let them not say in their hearts, Aha, Aha, our very wish; neither let them say; we have devoured him’ (Psalm 35:24-25 LXX). And ‘they gnashed their teeth on me. Lord, how long will You look on this?’ (Psalm 35:16-17 LXX), for ‘he lies in wait secretly as a lion in his den; he lies in wait to ravish the poor’ (Psalm 10:9 LXX); and, ‘He seeks from God his food’ (Psalm 104:21 LXX). And again, when all their efforts are exhausted, and they have failed to secure our deception, they must ‘be confounded and blush’ at the failure of their efforts, ‘who seek our souls to destroy them; and let them be covered with shame and confusion who imagine evil against us’ (Psalm 40:15, 35:26 LXX). Jeremiah also says, ‘Let them be confounded, and let not me be confounded; let them be afraid and let not me be afraid; bring upon them the fury of Your wrath, and with a double destruction destroy them’” (Jeremiah 17:18 LXX).

“When they are conquered by us they will be destroyed with a double destruction: first, because while men are seeking after holiness, they once possessed it, but lost it, and became the cause of man’s ruin. Second, even though they are spiritual existences, earthly ones have conquered them. Each one then of the saints when he looks on the destruction of his foes and his own triumphs, exclaims with delight, ‘I will follow after my enemies and overtake them; I will not turn until they

⁴⁶ John Cassian, 1st Conference of Abbot Serenus, I, vii, 20-21.

are destroyed. I will break them and they shall not be able to stand; they shall fall under my feet' (Psalm 18:37-38 LXX). In his prayers against them the same prophet says, 'Judge, O Lord, them that wrong me; overthrow them that fight against me. Take hold of arms and shield; and rise up to help me. Bring out the sword and shut up the way against them that persecute me; say to my soul, I am your salvation' (Psalm 35:1-3). And when by subduing and destroying all our passions we have conquered these, we shall then be permitted to hear those words of blessing, 'Your hand shall be exalted over your enemies, and all your enemies shall perish'" (Micah 5:9 LXX).

"And so when we read or chant all these Psalms, unless we take them as written against that spiritual wickedness, which lies in wait for us night and day, we shall not only fail to draw any edification from them to make us gentle and patient, but shall actually meet with some dreadful consequence, that is quite contrary to evangelical perfection. We shall be taught to avoid praying for or loving our enemies; we shall be stirred up to hate them, to curse them and to pour out prayers against them. And it is terribly wrong and blasphemous to think that these words might be uttered in such a spirit by holy men and friends of God."

Appendix B⁴⁷ God's "Righteousness"

A Roman Catholic friend (and a good theologian) recently asked me whether the Greek Fathers of the Church understand the term "righteousness" in a forensic sense. He was referring to a Protestant doctrine that holds that God does not "make" us righteous; He "declares" or "counts" us righteous. That is, God *imputes* righteousness to us, while we remain in a state of sinfulness; Luther would say, at once justified and sinful. Reading, for example, St Paul's letter to the Romans, my friend asked, do the Eastern Fathers also read the notion of "righteousness" forensically? Well no, I thought. But then I had to formulate something of the reason why. After a lot of stumbling, this is what I passed on to him.

The Protestant notion of "imputation," (as I understand it) grew out of the conviction that we are inherently (by nature) incapable of making ourselves righteous; we cannot become truly just on the basis of our own good deeds or merits. This states that insofar as the qualities of justice and righteousness are attributable to us, we should understand that God *imputes* them to us as an expression of His mercy. This God does so that we can re-enter the realm of His righteousness, His holiness, and thus be saved from the consequences of sin, which is (eternal) death. This interpretation, however, as many people have pointed out, means that our righteousness is little more than a legal fiction. God treats us *as if* we were just or righteous, although He (like us) knows full well that we are not⁴⁸.

The difference between this notion and the Orthodox perspective is well illustrated by our respective interpretations of Romans 5:12. In the West, at least in the popular mind, the debate was long polarized between Catholic emphasis on salvation through "works-righteousness," and Protestant insistence on "justification by faith (alone!)." The presupposition underlying both views is that we inherit Adam's *guilt*, which resulted from his sinful disobedience to the divine commandment⁴⁹.

Augustine seemed convinced that the guilt resulting from Adam's sin is transmitted through the sexual act, from generation to generation, like some deleterious gene. This "original sin" must be removed if we are to be saved from death, to share in eternal life. The question as to how this is accomplished has received many different answers. Medieval Catholic piety held that this occurs through infused grace, which confers upon us the power to perform righteous deeds and thereby actually to become or be made righteous. This enables us to build up a "treasury of merits," the term "merit" being understood as a gift of divine grace rather than our own accomplishment (Council of Trent, 1547). The popular notion that we are saved only if our merits outweigh our sins on the scales of divine justice is usually attributed to Roman Catholics. It is shared, nevertheless, by many Orthodox, who have failed to appreciate the fullness of God's grace, both

⁴⁷ Very Rev. John Breck, *God's "Righteousness"*, *Life in Christ*, September 2006, Article # 1, <http://www.oca.org>.

⁴⁸ D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1981, pp. 498-504) discusses various Protestant approaches to this question, including the distinction between "imparted" and "imputed" righteousness.

⁴⁹ Modern dialog between Catholics and Protestants has gone beyond this focus on inherited guilt and is concerned more with the meaning of "justification."

in enabling us to perform good works and in forgiving us fully when we sincerely repent of our sins⁵⁰.

To the Greek Fathers, what we inherit from Adam is not his sin and consequent guilt, but *mortality*⁵¹. From Adam (understood, really, as an archetype), we “inherit” the sting of *death*. Death has spread to all of humanity, as an inevitable consequence of our fallen nature; yet each of us, under the threat of death, rebels personally against God, the Author of Life. This means that our guilt is our own; we bring it upon ourselves. (A sign in our local marina declares: “You are responsible for your wake!” How true...)

Greek patristic tradition generally interprets Paul’s words as “righteousness,” rather than as “justice” in the forensic sense. That is, the term refers first to God’s own quality of righteousness, understood more as an expression of love and mercy than as one of divine justice that must be “satisfied.” Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, followers of Christ are capable of receiving that divine righteousness as a gift – one that can actually work a transformation in human life by enabling us to pray, to wage spiritual warfare against the passions, and to love both God and other people. Human nature remains “fallen”; but the Spirit leads the human person on a pathway of sanctification.

In the Eastern perspective, there is no thought that we must accumulate merits in order to justify ourselves before God, although our faithful often seem (as evidenced in Confession) to feel that if we are to be saved, our good works must outweigh our sins. Nor, on the other hand, is there a denial of the place and importance of good works in Christian life (Ephesians 2:8-10!). Salvation is accomplished by grace in response to faith. But that faith cannot be passive; it must express itself, not merely by confessing Jesus as “personal Lord and Savior,” but by feeding, clothing, visiting and otherwise caring for the “least” of Jesus’ brethren (Matthew 25:31-46).

What we are saved *from* is the key issue here. Rather than view salvation primarily as a forensic liberation from guilt through imputed or imparted righteousness, we should see it as incorporation, by baptism, into Christ’s death and resurrection, such that we “die and rise” with Him. Thus we are saved *from Death*. We are freed from this ultimate consequence of sin and guilt – but only as a divinely bestowed gift of God’s ineffable love, expressed in the suffering death of His Son, a gift to which we respond with faith that issues in love. That response, through the action of the indwelling Spirit, enables us finally to share in Christ’s own resurrection and glorification, attaining what the Greek Fathers⁵² call *theôsis* or “deification” (which means

⁵⁰ The common view of merits as a means by which we put God in our debt (never sanctioned as dogma), together with the idea of inherited guilt, has been treated well and in detail in recent Catholic reflection. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (§ 404-409), for example, makes an important distinction between original sin as a “deprivation of original holiness and justice” – which renders human nature “subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin” – and personal faults for which each of us is responsible. In this perspective, “original sin” is close to the Orthodox understanding of “fallen human nature.”

⁵¹ E.g., John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, X, v. 19; Maximus the Confessor, *Quaest. Ad Thal.* (PG 90:408). An excellent summary of this issue can be found in J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, Fordham University Press, 1974, pp. 143-146.

⁵² “Communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its ‘natural’ state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt – these are at the center of Byzantine understanding of the Christian Gospel.” J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 146.

existential participation in God's life, and not ontological confusion between God and His human creatures).

Good works should thus be understood to be a *response* rather than a *means* to salvation. And God's righteousness should be seen as a gift of loving, merciful, saving grace, rather than as a forensic tool, wielded in the service of divine judgment.